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GRACE LEE.

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GRACE LEE.

CHAPTER I.

MEN of an exacting mind and temper feel best at home in the society of women like Grace Lee. In them they find the equality their intellect requires, without the rivalry their pride resents or the tame docility which irritates the domineering temper it seems to indulge. Too conscious of his own power to feel the vulgar dread of being eclipsed, Owen would not have feared Madame de Staël herself, and more generous than Napoleon, he liked Grace all the better for being frank and daring. He had entered Miss Lee's house with the belief that this first visit should

be his last; he left it with the wish to return. He thought her rather impertinent, but impertinence was better than wearisome submission. Besides through all her plain speaking ran a train of subtle flattery his ear was quick to detect, and his wounded self-love but too ready to delight in. If she seemed to deal harshly with him, she was yet almost the only one who had read his temper and his genius, who knew what he was worth, and guessed what he might have achieved.

Thus willing to be again scolded and admired, John Owen after spending the whole day in the mountains visiting the sick, stopped at Miss Lee's door on a dark inclement night. His mood felt in unison with it; he was ready for another bitter outpouring. In answer to his ring a window opened, and a female voice said briefly :

“Miss Lee sees no one.”

“Is she unwell?”

The voice answered by another question put in an altered tone :

“I beg pardon, sir ; are you Mr. Owen ? ”

“ Yes, I am.”

The window closed abruptly, and in a few seconds more the servant opened the door and admitted him.

“ Miss Lee had told me, sir,” she said apologetically, “ but I had forgotten all about it.”

She ushered him in. “ So,” he thought, “ it seems she will admit no one, and that I am excepted.”

Phœbe preceded him up to the drawing-room door, pronounced his name, then closed the door upon him and left him. The drawing-room was brilliantly lit ; it was adorned with flowers, too, and a warm and perfumed air stole softly on the senses. The furniture was the same as in Mrs. Lee’s time, but perfect taste had so subdued everything into harmony that you forgot its existence.

Many a rare and costly work of art had been sent to Grace from her mansion in Park Lane by Gerald Lee. There were pictures on the walls—Cuyps soft and sunny; Claude scenes lovely and lone with still lakes, deep woods, and summer skies; warm and broad Italian landscapes, fresh Swiss mountain views, with Holy Families, gems of ancient art. Of statues there was but one, an exquisite copy of the muse Polymnia, beautiful, but of a beauty subdued to the expression of abstract meditation and absorbing thought. On a couch opposite her calm figure sat, or rather half reclined, Miss Lee, elegantly dressed. She rose to bid Mr. Owen welcome, then sank back careless and indolent.

“You expect visitors,” he said a little gloomily, and not accepting the luxurious seat to which her extended hand pointed.

“Pray do not look so alarmed,” replied Grace smiling, “to borrow the saying of Lucullus,

this evening Grace Lee receives Grace Lee, but no one else is expected."

"Friends like to meet alone: shall I not intrude?"

"We shall not mind you, so make yourself at home."

He yielded to her invitation, and with a sense of ease and rest found himself in a deep arm-chair by the side of a genial fire. She sat opposite him looking idly happy; no busy feminine task had been giving employment to her fingers; no Greek Father had been trying her brain; her look was vague and dreamy; slowly and indolently her lips uttered a few careless civil questions, then she fell into total silence.

"And so Miss Lee," he said, "you too have given up the world, the false, faithless world for solitude. You too, though you will not confess it, have proved how servile it is to success; how pitiless to failure; how mean ever."

The eyes of Grace were bent on the carpet; her

hands clasped on her knees played with her flowers ; her reply was slow to come. At length looking up at him she said gravely :—

“ Do you know Welsh ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered, “ but what does that prove ? ”

“ Nothing that I know of,” she replied, opening her eyes, “ but since you know Welsh, pray do say something to me ; I am dying to hear a little Welsh.”

Owen reddened, and bit his lip.

“ A wish easily gratified the first time you go out in the mountains,” he drily replied.

“ Yes,” she answered, “ but I am not in the mountains now, and it is now I am asking you, Mr. Owen.”

“ I understand, but do not speak it,” he said even more drily than before.

“ The more’s the pity ; I am in such a delightful mood to listen.”

“ That impertinent girl has the very soul of

Epicurus in her," indignantly thought John Owen. "Sit and talk Welsh to her, indeed!"

He was confounded at the presumption that had led her to express such a wish.

"Well," soon resumed Miss Lee, seeing that he sat sullen and silent, "you do not look as if you cared to speak either Welsh or Saxon. Never mind; there are pictures, books, flowers, luxurious seats; a warm fire within—without a wild night; everything that can lull one into that pleasantest of states—day dreaming. Just listen to that rushing rain."

And with her head half-turned to catch the sound, and a smile on her lips, she sat listening until her vague look betrayed that from the outward she had quite passed into the inward world. Mr. Owen had come to spend in speech, bitter and corroding thoughts, not to sit and dream in a scented drawing-room, with pictures, books, flowers, and a lady so well pleased with her own fancies that she could indulge in them without

reference to his presence. And as he hated to be baulked even in trifles, he set about demolishing Miss Lee's day dreams in the most merciless fashion. Bitter, sarcastic, cynical, he reviewed the world where they had both met, sparing nothing and no one. But to his surprise and annoyance, she could not have been more heedless and inattentive if he had spoken an unknown tongue. She evidently tried to listen to him; but spite of her polite efforts, she seemed unable to resist the seducing call of some voice within her. A start, a look, a random reply, showed him every now and then that he had failed even to interest and move her. Self-love was piqued, and curiosity was roused. What could Grace find so charming in her own thoughts that he was unable to compel her attention?

They sat there within a few paces of each other; each that infinite, wonderful world of thought, memory, feeling, passion, called a human being, each to the other known but by

those passing glimpses that irritate more than they sate the thirst to know more. Owen became suddenly silent, and Grace did not even heed it; she sat leaning back with her eyes fixed on the fire, and saw not that he also leaned back in his chair, and with his eyes keenly fastened on her, read her abstracted face like an open book.

Owen was a subtle and practised searcher of the minds of men. Grace had told him that he was no misanthrope—nothing could be more true. He was a great deal too clear-sighted, dispassionate, and experienced, to hate men for their follies, or even for their vices. Their minds were the only realm he cared to rule. No other empire had ever seemed to him worthy of his ambition. On this he had proudly fixed as on the widest and the most noble. And much as he resented having been baffled, the instinctive habit and delight of analysis still remained. Keenly and eagerly he now

set about analysing Grace Lee. The brow was open and poetic; the eyes were very fine; the mouth was mobile even in its repose. Curious to sound what he suspected to be a mine of rich ore, he re-opened the conversation, but in altered tones and on other topics. Carefully and skilfully he suggested such themes as he thought likely to please her present mood. Grace raised her head, her eyes lit, her lips smiled; she spoke; she was gay, witty, often eloquent, always free and natural. Her frank temper did not allow her to see that she was laying herself open to a look more penetrating than sympathetic; that Mr. Owen, in the true spirit of intellectual epicureanism, was making her mind minister to the pleasures of his, as a beautiful slave ministers to the pleasures of a careless master. Indolently he took his ease in the fresh and original world chance had thus led him to discover. Irregular he found it, a luxuriant wilderness; but he liked it all the

better for its contrasts of broad light and sudden shade that invited his curious eye. Carefully he searched it up and down,—for the first step in ruling minds is to read them,—and*Grace unsuspectingly allowed him to enter the region where her own fancies had until then dwelt alone. At his pleasure he wandered in that happy place: he saw nothing there that was not fair and graceful, but much that was mysterious. The delicate instinct of maiden modesty unconsciously guarded many a lonely spot, and wrapped it in cool shade, too deep for even his keen vision to pierce. Again and again he made the attempt, and he failed; the flowers of fancy and imagination were yielded to him in all their beauty and their fragrance. The more he gathered them, the more they bloomed in endless profusion and variety; but if, even remotely, he touched on those feelings that form the subtler portion of our daily life, the eloquent Muse was hushed at once into the silent woman. At length, unwilling

to startle her, he desisted from the indiscreet attempt, and allowed himself to be entertained for the rest of the evening. When he rose to go, he saw that Grace looked kindly on him, and he felt that there was friendliness in the pressure of her hand. Yet he was more amused at her mistake than penitent for having betrayed her confidence. His only thought as he went home was—"Pity all this should be thrown away on a woman who can never put it to the least use."

Mr. Owen forgot that those mental gifts which he had too much taste not to feel and admire, even though they were wholly foreign to his own, were not thrown away whilst they ministered to the pleasure of their possessor; and he did not seem to remember that they were essentially feminine gifts, useless to man; to a woman alone delightful. Genius is action: but in man that action immediately becomes creative; sensitive in woman. In both the flame burns; but if his often sheds a broader and a clearer light, it

rarely possesses the power of extracting delight and beauty from the everyday world, granted to her subtle quickness of emotion. For he kindles his from the concentrated powers of his intellect, whilst hers is fed from the depths of her own heart, and often lives and dies there, careless of fame.

Thus accomplished women, of whom it is impossible to say what they might have done if they had but tried, are, and always will be, more numerous than merely accomplished men. A man puts out his talent at interest; unless that talent is of the highest order, the very effort to make the most of it betrays its mediocrity. With a woman it is not so; what she possesses, much or little, remains more her own; its freshness is not wasted in arid struggles for bread and fame; her fancy, fair and luxuriant as a wild flower, claims to be no more. It gives to none the right to ask, "Why art thou not the rose of the garden?" - It blooms in wild and solitary places

where no eye perhaps shall ever behold its beauty, but neither shall it be gathered to wither early and be cast away a forgotten and faded thing. Sweet and pleasant is the shade where its happy life is spent. And why should its obscurity be lamented? Is its song less sweet to the nightingale for being unheard through the long summer night?

Happier far than they who must coin their most glorious gifts and stamp them with the world's image, are they who can keep those gifts sacred to their own hearts. Alas! since none save the proudest geniuses can hope to go down to posterity, why must so many obscurer destinies be sacrificed to the hope of a fame all cannot win? It is well that there should be with every age a few great victims, a few lofty men and women of poetry and song, to charm the toil and the sorrows of their obscurer brothers and sisters; but why should all want to sing, and so few remember that it may be sweet to listen?

Mr. Owen did not think enough of Grace to remember these things. Autumn yielded to deep winter, and winter to spring, and he never went near Miss Lee. At length on a mild February morning chance brought him so near her abode, that a sort of wish to know how she had fared through the long winter months, dawned upon him. He knocked at her door. An old servant trembling with age opened to him.

“Is Miss Lee at home?” he asked.

“Dead—dead and gone,” was the moaning reply.

“Dead!” he echoed; “why, when did she die?”

“Dead and gone!” replied the old woman, looking piteously in his face; “dead and gone!”

“Come, come,” he said, with a touch of impatience, “I am sure Miss Lee is not dead.”

“And why should she not be dead?” asked a voice close by.

He looked round quickly and saw Grace standing on the threshold of the parlour door.

"Dead and gone ! dead and gone !" muttered the old woman, vanishing down the kitchen staircase.

"She has been childish since Miss Lee's death," explanatorily observed Grace.

"And you keep this sybil about you !" he said, looking kindly on her. He felt rather pleased to find her living and well.

She saw it, gave him her hand, and smiling, looked up in his face.

They stood thus on the threshold of the parlour when Doctor Crankey suddenly appeared at the head of the staircase. He looked at John Owen, then at Grace, then he frowned and put forth his nether lip, and with a brief good morning came down and passed by them.

"I, too, must go," said Mr. Owen turning away.

"Adieu for another six months," gaily exclaimed Grace, going down the steps with him.

"I was not good enough to come near you," he replied apologetically.

"Mr. Owen do not tempt me to quote Latin :

Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.'

I mistrust compliments."

"Do not ; I would not flatter Venus for her beauty, a Queen for her power. I was sick of life too."

"Say of solitude. Go back to the world."

"With my lantern?"

"Are you Diogenes? then pray keep away, I hate cynics. But to resume: go back to the world—viz., to London."

"Why so?"

"Because your ill-humour has spent itself ; because though you may still feel that you have been ill-used, you can laugh at your own anger. Because ambition is wakening from her long slumber and again tormenting you. Deny if you can that you are haunted with the thought

of a destiny not completed and triumphs not achieved."

They were walking up and down the green lawn; his eyes were bent on the grass; he raised them slowly and smiled.

"Grace!" he said, "are you ambitious?"

"John," she solemnly replied; "I am not."

"I beg your pardon," he said, reddening slightly; "I forgot myself, but your name comes familiar to me. I had a little sister Grace who died young; if she had lived she would have been like you. It is no compliment to bid you notice that we are not unlike. We have the same hair and eyes, but my face is all shade; yours is all sunshine."

Grace looked up at him curiously and searched in his face for her own image; a sort of likeness she found, but she did not say so. He continued:

"We sympathise, too, in the moral world. I think that sometimes when you seem to read me, you are but turning over a page of your own

book, and that is why I ask you if you are ambitious."

"I should be if I were a man. And that is why I say to you, return to that glorious strife, return. You know you are sick of this life."

"Ay unto loathing," he replied, with some vehemence.

"Then leave it," she said; and clearly and eloquently, with a judgment and a knowledge of life for which he had not given her credit, she proved to him that his way was open. She told him nothing new, but it was soothing to hear her. Grace spoke long; he listened to her attentively; at length he left her. Gravely and thoughtfully she looked after him.

"He thought me dead," she thought, "and what did he care? living or dead, rich or poor, what is Grace Lee to John Owen?"

CHAPTER II.

DOCTOR CRANKEY had only been two days returned from Rome when Mr. Owen called on Miss Lee. Instead of quietly ascertaining whether his visits were few or frequent, he promptly drew his own conclusions, learned where Mr. Owen resided, and on the day that followed what he had seen, he walked off to the dwelling of his former pupil.

He found Owen standing in his wild garden, looking at the opposite mountains, along which moved a column of rain.

“Curious !” said Doctor Crankey.

John Owen turned round sharply. The priest stood close behind him, his head a little

on one side, his hands meeting behind his back ; he quietly continued :

“ Pretty place you have here.”

“ Will you walk in, sir,” replied Owen with a dreary smile, “ the interior corresponds with the exterior, I assure you.”

“ Thank you, I like air ; this seat is pleasant, too.” He sat down on an old wooden bench. Owen gave him a quiet look and sat down by him ; he saw that Doctor Crankey had come with a purpose, and he calmly waited to know what that purpose was. The priest began with something widely different from the mark.

“ Have you seen Doctor Wampley’s new lexicon ?” he asked abruptly.

“ No, sir, I have not,” replied Owen, with a half smile.

“ A stupendous work, John ; Grace admires it greatly. Of course you are aware Miss Lee is an accomplished Grecian.”

Owen smiled.

"I cannot see there is anything to laugh at in that?" tartly observed Doctor Crankey.

"True," replied Owen, "Greek is no laughable matter—in a lady especially."

"Nor to sneer at either!" exclaimed Doctor Crankey, now quite angry.

John Owen had some good points. He never forgot a benefit. Doctor Crankey had taught him in his youth, and not all his rude ways could make him forget the debt. So he good-humouredly replied:

"Indeed, sir, you are too hard upon me. To sneer at Miss Lee is the last thing I would be guilty of. She can afford to be learned, for she has two things rare in man or woman—modesty and good sense."

"True," fervently replied Doctor Crankey; "Grace is a fine creature, and John," he added, with a sudden gush of feeling that brought the tears to his eyes, and completely made him

forget this was not at all what he meant to say, "John, I like you for loving her."

Mr. Owen was anything but charmed to hear this. He had begun by disliking Grace, or rather by rebelling against the unconscious empire which, like all ardent persons, she exercised; then, involuntarily, he had felt compelled to recognise in her nature a certain greatness akin to and beyond his own; but his heart had remained quite untouched. Indeed, from early youth, he had felt that if he were to stoop to the folly of loving, he would love none save a beautiful woman. Love, as he conceived it, was a sweet dream of the senses which a fair face and youthful grace of form could alone inspire. Thus, there was no rosy-cheeked peasant girl that did not stand a much fairer chance of his heart than Grace Lee. He felt much provoked and annoyed, and at once set about removing the egregious mistake into which Doctor Crankey had fallen.

"I have, indeed, the greatest respect and

esteem for Miss Lee," he said in tones of ice.

"I was quite prepared for that," observed Doctor Crankey, with insulting scepticism. "There has been no such a thing as sincerity since the flood. Noah quite forgot to put the creature into the ark, and so the breed is lost."

"Doctor Crankey," coldly said Owen, "you are privileged. Yet I must contradict what I cannot affect to misunderstand; you labour under a mistake."

"Sir," loftily replied Doctor Crankey, "I was never mistaken once in my life, and I tell you frankly I do not approve your intentions with regard to Miss Lee."

Mr. Owen lost patience.

"Miss Lee is certainly an amiable and superior woman," he began.

"Amiable!" interrupted Doctor Crankey. "Sir, Grace is none of your namby-pamby, dollish, amiable women; she is a girl of genius,

not a paltry superior woman. I will add, too, sir, that she is a handsome girl."

And feeling this to be a doubtful point, he said it more positively and sternly. John Owen was reclining back on the crazy wooden seat. He mentally ran over, with the pitiless memory of man, the personal deficiencies of Grace; then smiled, a smile that needed no translation.

Doctor Crankey had written many a page, Doctor Crankey had preached many a sermon, on the vanity of earthly charms; but, instead of feeling piously glad that Grace should be held safe from such dangerous allurements, this good man was more wrath at the personal slight Owen seemed to cast on his beloved pupil than if he had wantonly accused her of the greatest mental imperfections; and as anger is blind and loses all sense of dignity, he rushed into observations and remarks far more derogatory to Grace than any John Owen thought of making.

"You do not seem to think so, sir," he said sharply.

"I think," impatiently replied Owen, "that of all women Miss Lee can best dispense with beauty. Handsome she is not, she is not even pretty; she is what most people would call plain."

"In short, not good looking enough to become Mrs. Owen," scornfully said Doctor Crankey.

"Really," sneered Mr. Owen, "this is a very ridiculous argument, and you show, sir, little regard for Miss Lee's name. I do not mean to compare myself with her in any sense, yet if I took a wife, which heaven forbid, she should, I confess it, be handsome."

"On the rule that contraries are good in matrimony," suggested Doctor Crankey, rising.

Owen bowed and smiled, and rising, too, accompanied his visitor to the limits of his home. With a stiff good morning, the priest strode off.

"That foolish old man's error must be

removed," thought Mr. Owen. Accordingly, the very same evening saw him enter Miss Lee's parlour and disturb a very learned conversation between the pupil and her master.

Doctor Crankey sat at a table covered with books; Doctor Wampley's lexicon was open before him, and every other lexicon ever written and published kept it company. Grace half-hidden by a pile of quartos, sat at the other end of the table. She looked tired and impatient, but on seeing Owen enter, her eyes lit, and she rose joyously.

"I am so glad you are come," she said, gaily.

"I was just turning into the Greek alphabet."

"Tut," observed Doctor Crankey, shortly, "you like it."

"No, I don't; no, I don't," cried Grace.

"You do, and so does Mr. Owen; he will be charmed as a scholar, to give us his opinion on this interesting explanation of Upsilon. Come here, John."

"I have forgotten Greek," said Owen, sitting down by Grace.

"Forgotten Greek!" echoed Doctor Crankey, horror-struck; "miserable man, what will you do?"

"Sit and talk English," replied Grace, for her visitor. "What have we to do with the Greeks, save to wish that their souls may rest in peace. Did they trouble themselves with Persian, or Phœnician, or Assyrian lexicons—why, then, should we?"

"Grace!" loftily began Doctor Crankey, "have you lost your wits?"

Miss Lee did not answer, but rang the bell.

"Phœbe," she said to her little maid, "just take away that table and those books if you please."

Doctor Crankey looked piteous; but did not venture to dispute this firman of his feminine sultan.

"And bring the round table," continued Miss Lee, "and the chess-board, and just step into

the drawing-room, and tell Mr. James Crankey that Doctor Crankey is anxiously waiting for him to begin a game of chess."

Phœbe vanished. In a few minutes the door opened again, and James Crankey entered. He had accompanied his uncle to Rome, and there completed his studies. Time and travelling had changed him little. He was still the same pale, slender youth, with calm, clear brow, and eyes full of light. At once his look became fixed on John Owen with a steady, attentive gaze, peculiar in one so young; but he did not open his lips.

Miss Lee averred that Doctor Crankey was longing to begin; he denied it rather tartly, and with a sneer suggested that Mr. Owen should take his place. Mr. Owen did not say nay; this slow calculating game had its attractions for him. So he and James Crankey sat down to their silent pastime.

"Mr. Crankey beats every one," said Grace, "even me, which is not civil."

The young man looked up from the chess-board with a glance and a smile, which though brief, said much to his partner. He watched him, and was edified by the keenness with which the chess-player prosecuted every advantage, as well as by the vigilance with which, without losing sight of the game, the lover kept his mistress within view.

Doctor Crankey had lured her to the sofa and to his darling lexicon; but she proved a restless neighbour. When at length he induced her to look over the page he was not reading—your learned people never read, which is like drinking when one is athirst, no they sip slowly, luxuriously—but rather conning over, her curls in stooping profanely veiled many a Greek word, and a whispered quarrel followed. It ended in Doctor Crankey's smiling, and complacently smoothing the dark and luxuriant tresses of his favourite. Grace had beautiful hair; she had also that pliant grace of form and motion, on which the eye rests with pleasure. The half shade in

which she sat softened all irregularities; there was something in her look and attitude as she appeared by the gray and stern old priest, which even the fastidious Owen confessed to himself resembled beauty, and which to James Crankey probably seemed all that was enchanting in woman, for in looking at her he forgot the game, made a false move, and was at once checkmated. The two players rose; without seeming to hurry in the least, or to seek for it, naturally, without effort, James Crankey quietly took by Miss Lee, the place John Owen who wished to speak to her, was going to take. Men do not require to be in love to brook no rivals; Owen resented the young man's presumption, and defeated it by asking Grace to play a game of chess with him. She consented at once, and he managed that the game should be a long one. At its close he rose to go. At once James Crankey declared that a walk would do him good, and said he would accompany Mr. Owen. In

vain his uncle forbade it, and Grace attempted to dissuade him. Mr. James Crankey persisted.

"I wish you would not, James," softly said Grace, laying her hand on his arm, and Mr. Owen saw her look and smile like a woman conscious of her power.

"I had rather go; I feel the walk will do me good," replied the young man, but the words were not said without effort.

She detained him no more.

The night was mild and calm; a pale February night, with a dim moon, that now and then looked forth from behind white mists. The dark lines of the mountains were scarcely defined on the sky: they looked far, vague, and dim. The road of John Owen lay through a lonely region; the night was not frosty, but slightly chill; he walked slowly, without deigning to give a word or a look to his companion.

But James Crankey was not easily daunted. He spoke on various topics, all closing with Grace.

He implied more than he confessed his affection for her ; and then he wandered away to his uncle, whom Miss Lee liked, but did not mind ; and Mr. Owen, whom he felt sure she would mind ; and his own liking for her, which she seemed to forget, and still he kept away from the point, like a fearful mariner from a perilous rock.

They stood where two roads met in an open space by a lonely tree ; the moon looked down over the mountain side, and between her and earth lay vague depths of darkness. Mr. Owen saw James Crankey's face pale, effeminate, yet expressive of wile—of patience and will. "Strange," he thought, "this young man is jealous of me ; yet he seems to wish me to remind Miss Lee of what a woman never forgets ; his liking for her. Why so?"

Keenly and eagerly he searched the young man's heart ; with the skill of a practised hand he sifted away the chaff, and reached the truth. The uncle thought him in love with Grace ; the nephew

thought Grace in love with him ; with this clue he traced James Crankey in all his windings ; his jealousy sprang from Miss Lee's supposed preference ; to destroy it, and sting her in her self love and her pride, he had, with too little skill, perhaps, yet with a quick sense of a woman's nature, tried to entice his unconscious rival to plead in some sort his cause. Owen felt in unravelling this plot the pleasure of a mind that delighted in analysis, and the scheme by which James Crankey had presumptuously thought to render him subservient to his passion, yielded Timon some scornful amusement :

“ I suppose, Mr. Crankey,” he said, turning towards him, then he paused ; he stood alone, James Crankey had bid him good night unheard, and was gone.

Mr. Owen walked on, absorbed in thought. They who dive down deep into the hearts and the minds of others must expect dangerous knowledge. Every power of Mr. Owen's mind was now

fastened on Grace. On what slight yet subtle signs had her lover come to the conclusion most tormenting to a lover's heart. And why did he, John Owen, wish to know this? What mattered to him what place he held in the heart of Grace Lee?

He walked on and she went with him. He remembered her years ago, a pale slender girl with fine eyes; then he saw her as he had met her one morning in the mountains, a lady richly dressed. He saw her in Mrs. Lee's house, that where she now lived; he saw her in her splendid home in Hyde Park, rather proud but very kind. He saw her, too, in his own home in the pantry with Mrs. Skelton, in her garden, in her sunny parlour, and always, sharp though her speech might be, she looked at him pleasantly. Suddenly he was roused from this reverie by the smart tap of a switch or wand on his shoulder. He turned round indignant and surprised; a figure on horseback passed by with a light mocking laugh, which he recognised at once. He soon overtook and stopped her.

“You!” he said, amazed, “you here, and at this hour.”

Miss Lee, for it was she, sang gaily two lines from the Irish song:—

“Sir Knight, I feel not the least alarm,

“No son of Erin will offer me harm.”

“But I see,” she added in prose, “that your sense of propriety is outraged. Well, sir, the damsel is not unprotected; a venerable hermit and a page are in the rear; they are engaged in discussing the similarity between Greek and Welsh; two things which she suspects to be as much alike as this peaceful pony and fiery Vagabond, that seemed to bear his mistress on the wings of the wind, in the days when she was a princess, and before she had exchanged a gold handled jewelled set whip for a hazel wand—and where is James?—what have you done with the lad, Mr. Owen?”

“Truly, nothing; he left me like a spirit. What brings you out so late?”

“A poor sick Italian sailor has sent for me. He lives beyond the torrent. You attend him I know. Is there hope for him?”

“Oh! he may linger till the spring. What does he want with you?”

“A few words of the sweet Southern speech; an Italian greeting—an Italian adieu.”

“And you gratify him.”

“His time to wish is short; what a chill languor there is in the air of this February night,” she added, in a wholly altered tone. “Ah! do you remember this spot, Mr. Owen?”

They stood in the dell of the Ap Rhydon: around it mountains closed, and through them the torrent rushed foaming. The sky that seemed clear, because all lay dark below it, spread above a field of gray clouds, with here and there a distant star; the waning moon touched with her white light a few projecting rocks, an unsteady bridge of plank, and the full waters that flowed below.

Miss Lee, availing herself of a fragment of rock close by, stepped down lightly, and, throwing the bridle on the pony's neck, she sat down. The stone was broad and smooth, for the waters of the torrent had often washed it in spring ; it lay at the foot of a wall of rock ; a tall fir tree grew near it, and rose dark, even in the dark night. Owen sat down by her ; she was silent, and he did not speak.

The figures of a man and a boy soon appeared on the bank of the torrent.

"Grace !" cried the anxious voice of Doctor Crankey.

"I am here," she replied, rising.

"And what made you wander away alone ?" he said chidingly.

"I am not alone, I met Mr. Owen."

Doctor Crankey's temper soured immediately ; he crossed the bridge, scolding his Welsh page ; then he scolded Grace, then the pony. Miss Lee followed him laughing, and increased his

irritation by announcing her resolve to proceed to the sailor's dwelling with no other escort than that of the boy. In vain the priest chided, and even Owen remonstrated; Grace was too much used to have her own way not to be wilful; and as, after all, there was nothing like danger to run, they were obliged to yield.

She went, and they remained alone, neither caring much for the company of the other. Doctor Crankey sat down on the stone grumbling against the daughters of Eve, who all more or less resemble their mother. Mr. Owen wandered away down the banks of the torrent. He heard it rushing through the night, and recognised with a thrill sounds that had been the music of his boyhood. This had been one of his favourite haunts; here his heart had often beat with delight as he felt conscious of that deep solitude which youth loves and half dreads. Here, too, eager ambition had learned to weary of mountains and torrents, and pined to soar on lofty wing

beyond all barriers into the wide world of men. Cities buried in ruins, or thronged with countless thousands, had once haunted that wild Welsh dell; even as with its sunlit rocks, its foaming waters, and dark waving trees, it had haunted the lonely attic, where dwelt a bitter, disappointed man. And now he had returned to that which afar seemed a vision of lost peace, and which, when found again, became, as before, all unquietness.

“And is there, then,” thought John Owen, “and is there, then, no such thing as repose! Vainly has it been made the cry of our inward hearts, a thirst that pursues us through life, which some have thought to sate in death, whilst others, feeling that even beyond the grave there could be no true rest, have uselessly called out for annihilation! I hold ye happy, ye who in contemplation or prayer, ye who in the serene joys of art or song, ye who in the sweet torpor of some mighty passion, have rested awhile your

weary wing, and known I will not say hours, but moments of that divine calm, I, in any of these, can never know. I hold ye happy, I who from boyhood to youth, from youth to manhood, have led as I shall lead from manhood to age, a life of fever and unrest." And a secret voice answered him: "You hold them happy! I do not believe you, John Owen! Moments of calm are to you moments of torment. All that can give peace you slight and scorn, all that troubles is your heart's delight. As the hunter hunts down his prey, so do you, shut out from external ambition, pursue at least the thoughts that breed tumult and strife. But complain not, you are perhaps as happy in your restlessness, as others in their peace. The lake sleeps silently in the valley; the torrent comes down the mountain side; it leaps from rock to rock with boiling foam and a rushing voice. Summer and winter the lake lies clear and changeless, whilst spring snows swell the torrent and a July sun leaves its bed bare

and dry; yet to be the lake, for its beauty, its stillness and deep peace, would the torrent give up its life so wild and free!"

"And where is Mr. Owen?" said the voice of Grace.

And Mr. Owen, who was within hearing, though not within view, suddenly woke from his dream, and saw her on horseback by the stream.

"Gone!" impatiently replied the priest. "Who ever knew him to stay quiet for five minutes? Now when I compare him to a nice quiet lad like James——"

"Indeed, then," impatiently interrupted Grace, "you will do well not to compare them. Mr. Owen is a man and not an ordinary man either; and James is a lad, and there is an end of it."

The uncle angrily replied something which Owen could not hear, but which made Grace laugh.

"Doctor Crankey," she said, a little scornfully, "you are dreaming? I tell you he is in love with

another lady. A fine lady she is ; she is handsome, very handsome ; she wears rich robes, rich and splendid ; a crown too, a real crown set with rubies ; and for one kiss of her hand, for one touch of her garment, Mr. Owen would give a dozen dark Graces like me."

"Is she a queen?"

"Queen regnant."

"Do you want to make a fool of me, child?"

"As if I could," said Grace softly ; and Owen saw her bend a little and gently stroke the old man's cheek. Doctor Crankey grumbled to himself and crossed the little bridge, striking it with his stick ; the pony entered the water, and in the middle paused to drink. For a while Mr. Owen saw the face of Grace. Was it pale, or did the moonlight that shone on it make it seem so ! He knew not. He watched her crossing the stream, then he turned away.

His very heart was troubled within him. There was a thought that crept like a subtle fever in his

blood, that beset him like a foe ever on the watch. It gave him no pleasure; it was joyless, but it was all absorbing. For there was that about Grace that could not be slighted. It was easy enough to say, "I do not and I will not love her;" but it was impossible to think with indifference, "She loves me."

Haunted with the thought he called on her the next morning. She was alone, embroidering in the parlour; she received him with frank kindness; but what of that? Grace was too proud ever to sink into a mere love-sick girl. Owen felt intuitively that though her heart were breaking, she could still meet his look and smile in his face. "She is not cold or weak," he thought, looking at her dark face; "to love with her is passion or it is nothing, and passion though it may be a wasting fever, also gives fever's strength." But still he knew nothing; he remembered James Crankey and thought of a test that tempted him. He turned the conver-

sation on the young man ; skilfully yet carelessly he allowed Grace to feel that he was pleading her young lover's cause. She reddened, but she said nothing. Why did he not stop there? What mattered it to him how much or how little Grace Lee liked him? Ought he not to have longed for blindness and dreaded knowledge? But they who once begin the perilous search he had undertaken, know not where to stop. As eagerly as an enamoured lover did this faithless friend now search and sound the thoughts of Grace. Subtle and insidious, he spared no art to make her betray the secret a woman guards with the life-blood of her heart. He spared no art, yet honourable even in his ungenerous inquisition, he never seemed conscious of the love he suspected or implied that which he did not feel. At length he triumphed! Grace turned crimson, gave him one look, then bent over her frame and looked no more. He left her, cursing James Crankey and his own folly in seeking to know that

which known was only the fond weakness of a woman.

Yet why hide it? In the thought that Grace Lee loved him Mr. Owen now found a luxurious charm. It was soothing to humbled pride that whilst the world scorned him, a woman who held that world at her feet, should for his sake have rejected a splendid fortune and buried herself in solitude. It was pleasant to a heart that had long remained barren and dry to receive that one pure drop of affection:—a proud and noble woman's love.

His temper which led him to value things hard to win, also made him secretly prize that which was his entirely. For if he was ambitious, he was no less despotic; if to desire was a sort of passion nothing could sate, to possess was a pleasure scarcely less keen. The regard of Grace Lee left him indifferent; but the thought of her exclusive preference haunted him. He longed to see her again, to search deeper and farther in

her heart, to convince himself that he had not dreamed it. The day seemed endless ; at length evening came and again saw him enter her dwelling.

Miss Lee was in the parlour with Doctor Crankey and his nephew. The young man looked up, bowed coldly to Mr. Owen, then again bent his eyes on the volume he was reading and raised them no more. Grace stood by the mantelpiece talking to her old friend. She received Mr. Owen with cool politeness. He did not mind this, but quietly took the place left vacant by the priest, who, on seeing him, had with a huffed air, walked off to the table. Owen opened a slow conversation and looked at her in the glass near him. Her elbow leaned on the marble mantelpiece ; her cheek rested on her hand ; her attitude was not without grace ; her falling sleeve left her arm half bare, and it was a lovely arm ; her raven curls fell heavy and luxuriant down her neck and shoulders ; her face

proud and pale, was certainly not beautiful, but her smile was pleasant though rather scornful. Mr. Owen examined her slowly, attentively, then suddenly his eyes, still in the glass, sought hers. He had often admired their light and splendour, for they were indeed very fine eyes; but for the first time he saw them under another aspect—proud and silent. He searched their dark depths and found a strange pleasure in so doing; a still greater pleasure he found in trying to dispel her cool manner. At first he failed, but rather amused at the cool hauteur with which she repelled his efforts, he only persisted the more. At length he succeeded, and tested his power. With secret triumph he felt the chill melt from her manner! reluctantly she yielded to the charm—but she yielded. Some very good people can never please; it is not in them: some very disagreeable people need only wish to please to do so. Mr. Owen was of these, for nature had made him eloquent,—a gift often dangerous to

others besides its possessors, but which no one could accuse him of abusing by exercising it too often. Satisfied with having prevailed, he did not startle Grace by any extraordinary display of amiability, and left early.

But when he came the next day he found that it was all to begin over again. Again, and not merely that time, but every time he came, he had to conquer coolness and reserve. Let men who value time have nothing to do with the society of women. It is impossible to indulge in it without catching some of their tendency to absorb existence in the subtle and evanescent, yet ever renewing emotions of their daily life. Many were the hours Mr. Owen now lost with Grace, spite of Doctor Crankey's black looks and James Crankey's pale jealousy. Incredible would have been to him a few months before, the efforts he made to tame this wayward girl, once so free, now grown so provokingly shy. Once, as a boy, he had followed a whole day long a bird,

which, when caught, he tossed back on the air to liberty. And now, as then, he was led beyond his original intention, to pursue that which in itself he little valued; a thing as light of wing, as hard to capture as any bird of the air, the liking of a woman.

CHAPTER III.

THE sea broke on a beach white with recent snow, then faded away dark and indistinct on a grey sky. As far as the eye could pierce rose snow-covered cliffs; their uniform tint relieved now and then by shades of pale blue and mild yellow. The sun was near his setting; he suddenly looked forth, lit the whole coast with a fitful flame, then like a monarch whose end mortal gaze must not profane, he again entered his dense mansion of cloud, there to die unseen in all his power and beauty.

Reluctantly John Owen turned away from the lonely sea-shore, and entered the fastnesses of the mountains; their gloom seemed to close around

him like that of some solemn cathedral. The snow again fell with that softness and silence which give to its fall a character so unearthly; the air felt chill and penetrating as death. The whole scene was, as some ice-bound region, desolate and wild. Mr. Owen's way lay through a narrow dell overhung with steep, stern rocks that shone white and spectral like icebergs. Under a crag, sheltered by its projection from the falling snow, sat a woman. A dark cloak enveloped her whole person; its hood was drawn over her bowed head, her hands were clasped around her knees. At once her still figure caught the eye of John Owen; he recognised her with incredulous wonder.

"Miss Lee!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

"Looking at the snow falling," she replied, without changing her attitude.

The spot where she sat was easy of access; a few steps brought Owen to her side.

“Miss Lee,” he said with half-indignant remonstrance, “do you not know the danger you run by lingering here?”

“And so there is danger? I was beginning to suspect as much.”

“Then, why did you stay?”

“Indeed, Mr. Owen, because I could not help it. I came to look at the sea; I thought to find my way back easily, but I lost myself in these mountains. So not knowing which way to turn, and for fear of worse, I climbed up here and thought to wait the morning quietly.”

“That morning would have shone for you in heaven, Miss Lee. No morning on earth would you have seen again after a night spent here.”

“I dare say you are right,” she replied quietly; “I was beginning to feel drowsy, and to think of the French soldiers in Russia. Do you know the way out of this, Mr. Owen?”

“Quite well; but can you come at once?”

Night is drawing on, and the snow is falling faster."

She rose and took his arm. He led her on through gloomy and intricate paths; the snow drifted full in their faces, and they made but slow progress. At length they reached a more open space; but though John Owen stood still, and looked and listened, he neither saw the bridge of plank which stretched across the Ap Rhydon, nor heard the voice of the torrent below it. In a gap of the rocks there was a glimmering of dull light, and in the distance a deep and rushing sound.

"I am but a sorry guide," he said at length; "I confess I know not where we are."

"Where we were an hour ago," replied Grace; "there is the opening that leads to the sea, and there the crag by which you found me sitting."

Owen remained thunderstruck. Day-light was not quite spent; he saw that Grace spoke but too truly; they were in the same narrow dell

where he had found her; but time had been wasted since then, and everything looked doubly drear though the thickly-falling snow.

"Shall we try the coast?" he said, after a pause; "there at least there can be no mistaking the way."

He took a step forward; Grace by laying her hand on his arm detained him.

"Listen!" she said.

Again the deep rushing sound filled the pause that followed.

"The wind sweeping down the shore," he said hastily.

"Or the tide coming in," she suggested.

"I shall try. You do not mind remaining a few minutes alone?"

"Oh, no! Go, Mr. Owen."

He went and disappeared in the cloud of snow that was drifting to the sea. Soon his dark figure was seen slowly returning. He found Grace again sitting under the crag. A few

strides brought him to her side. "It is but too true," he said, a little gloomily, "the tide is coming in with all the force and fury of a tempest. It flows, or rather, it dashes at the very base of the rocks, and we must be glad of the mountains for a refuge."

"Had we not better stay here?" asked Grace.

"Here, here!" he exclaimed, impatiently, "and be frozen to death and blocked up by the snow."

"Then you do think that to stay here would be to perish?"

"I have strength enough to brave even such a night as this; but you——"

"Be not too confident of life," she interrupted, "are you prepared to die, Mr. Owen?"

"Indeed, Miss Lee, life and death are very indifferent matters to me."

"Oh! not to me," murmured Grace; "sweet is life though the hearth be lonely: ay, even here in this desolate spot, with the snow falling fast

around us, I think with a pang of the warm firesides we shall see no more."

"And why should we not see them again?" he asked with a chiding laugh. "I mean to take tea with you this evening, Miss Lee."

"Do not jest," she said, in a tone of pain.

"Jest! I was never more serious. I now remember quite well where I took the wrong turn."

He took her arm; she yielded silently, and they resumed their journey. After a long and fatiguing walk they paused. This time there had been no mistake, they stood on the very brink of the torrent, by the broad stone and fir-tree, where Grace had rested on the evening John Owen had met her. The night was too dark to see the water, but they heard it leaping down the rocks, and rushing away with strange fury in its bed of stone.

"Miss Lee," said Owen, "we can do two things. We can go to your house; but the way

is long and wild. We can cross Ap Rhydon and take refuge in the nearest dwelling ; 'tis short, but 'tis dangerous."

"Let us go home," said Grace.

They turned homewards, but the way lay through a rocky defile, and through that opening the blast, laden with snow, poured with a force so impetuous that mortal strength could not attempt to brave it.

"We must cross the torrent after all," said Owen ; "but the bridge, where is the bridge ?"

The bridge was gone. It was but a plank ; the angry waters had swept it away. Grace, with the silent and passive courage of woman, sat down resignedly and drew her cloak around her. John Owen, with knit brow and compressed lips, stood by this new barrier between life and death ; he loved one and dreaded the other as little as any man, but he had no fancy for being found stiff and stark under a foot's depth of snow in the morning ; so he stood revolving a last

chance of life: after a while he raised his head and said abruptly,

“We must try the ford.”

“The ford!” exclaimed Grace, “is there one?”

“Three steps lower down. The boy has often crossed it, and surely the man is equal to the same achievement.”

“Mr. Owen, I know by the sound of that water that it is fearfully rapid and swollen. Do not be rash.”

“Indeed I could defy water twice as fierce as that you deem so terrible.”

“Defy nothing: we are in the hands of God!”

“And Heaven helps those who help themselves.”

“True.”

He said nothing, but, passing his arm around her, he attempted to raise her. With an effort Grace disengaged herself.

“Have you lost your senses?” she cried, with more alarm than anger. “Carry me on such a

night—through such a stream? why it would be death to you, and not life to me.”

In vain Owen tried to convince her of the contrary: Grace remained inexorable. She urged him, however, to make the attempt alone; he peremptorily refused. In vain she reminded him that he could not serve her by staying, whereas, once on the other bank, he might find and send aid to her,—he would scarcely listen to her. With involuntary tenderness, he asked if she thought he could or would forsake her. And Grace, in a tone cold as ice, replied:—

“Mr. Owen, we met in a lonely spot: strangers might have met thus. You offered me aid and guidance: a stranger might have done as much, and therefore I accepted. But now that you offer me your life, I refuse; I deny your right to impose such an obligation upon me. I deny it, Mr. Owen, I deny it.”

“Why so?” he asked resentfully: “are we not friends?”

"We are not. We might have been, but we are not. You have wronged me in your thoughts, and you know it."

He did know it: the truth flashed across his mind—he had been deceived; and Grace had, stinging thought, all along read and resented his strange, foolish error. He did not reply: he could not. He stood with burning brow, waiting for more.

"I may have been too confident, too free," she resumed; "a zealous friend, a jealous boy may have misled you; besides, you have a good excuse, you know nothing of women. I forgive you, but I feel that friends we are 'to be no more.'"

"I have deserved this," he said, a little bitterly, "yet know that you vainly deny me a right beyond your power. Had I never seen your face I would no more desert you than I do now. You may without scruple accept my aid to-night: we need not be better friends to-morrow. At all

events, I beg you will no more urge me to go alone,—it is ungenerous, it is insulting.”

She did not reply, but sat down on the stone by the torrent. He did not sit down by her: with the reckless generosity of superior strength he leaned against the fir-tree, and placed himself so as to shelter her from the wind and snow. For a while the strange storm of vexed wonder and wounded pride Grace had raised within him, made Owen forget the storm without. Her scornful tone,—those stinging words, “Besides, you know nothing of women,” still rang in his ears. Few things in his life had so chafed and irritated him as this mistake. At length he roused himself: there was a sort of lull in the tempest,—the wind was less keen, the snow less heavy, but the cold was intense. Not without embarrassment, Owen turned round and asked his companion how she felt. She did not answer; he stooped: exhausted with long fasting, cold, and fatigue, Grace had fainted.

He raised her gently, and sitting down by her, he shared with her the folds of his ample cloak. He rested her heavy head on his arm, breathed on her chill face, and chafed in his own her hands cold as death. But in vain : spite of all his efforts to give her some of his own living warmth, Grace remained in the same cold swoon or slumber.

When she woke, she felt herself raised and borne, at first she could not have said how. She heard the wind come rushing down the mountains, and the waters flow fast and fierce in their rugged bed.

“ Hold fast,” whispered Owen, who had felt her stirring, “ Hold fast.”

Grace obeyed. She knew that he was carrying her through the torrent. He had reached the middle of the stream safely, but he felt dizzy and exhausted. Grace, though her weight was not great, impeded his movements ; her arms were clasped around his neck, her head rested on his shoulder : her long hair, unloosed by the sudden-

ness with which he had raised her, was driven by the wind in his face, and half-blinded him. She kept, however, so mute and still that, but for her quick breathing, and the beating of her heart, he might have fancied her still unconscious. He suddenly paused. A change had come over the night; it was not dark, but again mountains, rocks, and trees had vanished in a pale, livid space, more appalling than darkness. Owen, gathering all his strength, stood still; Grace hid her face against him,—the sense of a vast and terrible infinite surrounded her: Earth with her happy homes seemed miles away,—nameless dread chilled her blood and her heart.

“Hold fast!” again said Owen.

Grace closed her eyes and surrendered her soul and her life to God. The storm broke; it rushed past like a white angel of destruction and of death; they heard it whirling round the dell, then dashing against the rocks. On that night many a brave and bold ship was lost at sea; shepherds

and their flocks perished on the bleak mountains of Scotland. A long caravan of travellers with their guides never left the White Alps. These two were spared in that lone Welsh dell; around and over them the storm broke, them it touched not. But at first they knew not their fate. Memory grasping in a few seconds, a whole lifetime, brought them both to a wild night, a rushing stream, and a shroud of snow. Then followed that drear blank from which the soul shrinks with such strange horror. His arms had clasped her more firmly; hers had clung to him more close; last farewell felt not spoken that seemed to comprise ages and lasted but a few minutes. That trance over, they woke from their breathless stillness; it still snowed fast, but the first fury of the storm was spent; a little more and Owen had reached the other bank.

He put Grace down; he said nothing nor did she. Both looked with silent awe across the stream to the spot they had left. It was there

the storm had broken and still reigned. They heard a wild moan, then a loud crash, then they saw something dark and tall fall towards the torrent: the fir-tree beneath which Grace had sat, had been uprooted by the wind. It no sooner touched the angry waters than they sucked it in, whirled it round with fearful force, then with a louder roar as if rejoicing over their prey, they sent it drifting down their rapid and dark current. The danger was over, Grace stood safe on the other bank, yet she clung terrified to Owen. He passed his arm around her, drew her closer to him and even in that moment he thought with scornful pleasure:

“Proud girl! is your pride humbled so far?”
but aloud he merely said:

“We are safe now, Miss Lee.”

Grace did not reply, but in the silence of the night now calmed down to something like stillness, he could hear her breathing deeply, and he felt her trembling from head to foot. Yet

she was the first to speak and say : " Let us leave this spot, Mr. Owen." She took his arm ; he led her safely along a snow-covered path ; after a few minutes he paused.

" What has happened ? " asked Grace.

Before he could reply, she started back dazzled with the glare of a light that suddenly broke on the darkness of the night, and then she saw that they stood on the threshold of a wild mountain cabin with dark ceiling and mud floor and an ardent fire blazing on the wide low hearth. By it crouched a white-haired sybil-looking woman well stricken in years ; on a heap of straw in the corner lay a moaning figure with dark flowing hair and wild dark eyes, and Grace looking at him knew where she was : in that house where a few nights before she had gone to see the sick Italian sailor, who pined for the speech of his own land as the thirsty wayfarer in the desert pines for the sweet waters of the spring. How had he come there so far from his country ? By no

strange fate, but in the usual course of things. In the warm summer months he had strayed to the cool mountains; there he had sickened, and a poor creature who knew no more of his soft language than he of her wild speech, had sheltered him through the winter days drear and dark. And now he was dying, and his thoughts wandered far, and when Grace bent over him he knew neither her face nor her voice.

“Heed him not, he cannot hear you;” said Owen, leading her away to the fire.

There was in the whole room but one old wooden stool; he made her sit down on it, he unfastened her cloak heavy with snow, he chafed in his own her numb hands—they soon returned to natural heat. As the light of the blazing hearth played flickeringly on her face, Owen saw it flush red and bright. Her blood was warm and fervent, and within her the source and spring of life ever flowed strong and free.

“I am well now,” she said, attempting to rise,

but he would not allow her. He drew her seat near the wall, between it and her head he placed a rude pillow, fashioned of her own cloak, his he threw over her; then, with a smile, he said, "Good-night, Miss Lee, for this is your bed to-night."

Grace yielded without replying; she felt in a dream. The old woman who had not moved from the hearth, but looked on in apathetic surprise, now uttered a few guttural sounds in Welsh. In the same language Mr. Owen answered her briefly. Then again the cabin was still, save for the wailing of the wind without, and the low moans of the Italian sailor within. Alas, he was raving; for he spoke of a land where the mountains were green, not white,—where the snow never fell,—where the sun ever shone.

Subdued by fatigue and recent cold, Grace slept. Yet before her eyes closed, her mind received once more the strange picture around

her: the wild-looking room, half lit and half dark; in its gloom the dying Italian; in the blazing light the antique white-haired Welsh sybil; and standing on the hearth by her, with his eyes rivetted on her face, the erect figure, folded arms, and dark countenance of John Owen.

When Miss Lee awoke, the sun shone bright on a snowy world. With night, the storm had passed away; the day was cold and brilliant. Mr. Owen stood looking down at her, smiling.

“Do you always sleep so?” he asked.

“Always,” replied Grace, shaking her head still heavy with slumber.

“Then truly you enjoy perfect health.”

“I have never yet known one day’s illness. And where is our hostess, and how is that poor man?”

“She is out, and he is sleeping, We can leave this very moment if you wish.”

“Ay, truly, I do wish; poor Doctor Crankey, what will he have thought?”

“ Doctor Crankey and Mr. James Crankey are waiting for you in the Ap Rhydon. They are not here, for a very good reason, they could not cross the torrent; but another primitive bridge will not take long to fashion.”

“ And how do they know I am here,” interrupted Grace, looking at him. “ Ah, Mr. Owen! Mr. Owen! what have you been doing whilst I slept?”

In her earnestness she took his hand and looked up in his face, but drawing her arm within his, he quietly said it was time to go, and led her out of the cabin. The Ap Rhydon was soon reached. With a shudder Grace saw the stern valley still white with shroudlike snow, the torrent still furious and foaming; one as awful in its stillness, as the other in its wrath.

“ And here,” she said, “ if your head had swam but one moment, if your heart but for one second of time had failed you, here we both must have perished miserably.”

“ Miss Lee, do you not see Doctor Crankey ? ”

“ Ay, and James too ; and I dare say I could hear them but for this roaring water. Mr. Owen, it was not your strength bore you through it ; God was with you last night.”

She sat down flushed and excited on a fragment of rock. He looked down at her ; then said quietly, “ You are safe now, Miss Lee. A little while longer, your friends will stand by your side. I need not wait that moment. I need not tell you that between them and me there is little liking ; and that I have had the good fortune to render you this service will not increase the store. Therefore, adieu, and in every sense of the word—farewell ! ”

Grace turned red and pale ; she rose, “ Mr. Owen,” she said, “ what is your meaning ? ”

“ A plain one ; to bid you good-bye once for all.”

“ Once for all, and yet you have saved my life, Mr. Owen ; but for you I should now be lying

dead under white depths of snow, or that dark tree would have crushed me. I tell you that you have saved my life."

She spoke as if the argument were unanswerable, but he remained dark and unmoved. She read his face, and in a broken tone she said: "Mr. Owen, I fear you have a proud, hard heart; I fear you wish to humble me by leaving me under the burden of a debt I cannot repay. Know that you are deceived. I grudge you nothing gratitude can yield from one heart to another. You have saved my life, and every day of my existence I will bless the name of my deliverer; yet, know also," she added, looking him full in the face, "that if it did not please me to owe that life to you, I could scorn it as a worthless gift. Know that if I wished it, I could bid the days you have lengthened be but as dust in my sight."

Her voice rose loud and clear. She spoke with a warmth that was not anger, for her

temper had the ardour of a summer noon, without its storms ; her mobile face could express every feeling, every passion, save the ungentle ones of wrath and hate. The eyes of Owen were bent on the earth ; he raised them slowly, and looked at her ; her cheeks were flushed ; her parted lips quivered ; her eyes shone on him beautiful in their mingled pride and softness.

“ You are a grand creature,” he said, smiling at her with involuntary admiration,—“ a truly grand creature, but you are the only being that ever did or could humble me, and I confess I am not good enough to be humbled often.”

“ And so,” said Grace, “ we must part it seems, part by the Ap Rhydon, where we met once, do you remember it, Mr. Owen ? It was a very lovely summer’s day. Do you remember, too, that once, when little thinking we two should ever meet again, I said to you good-night and good-bye, you wouldn’t grant the adieu to be final ? and now ’tis your wish, and it must be

obeyed. Good-bye then my deliverer, my friend, may God bless—may God ever save you ! ”

She took his hand and clasped it, she pressed it to her heart, then dropped it and sat down once more by the torrent. Awhile he stood still, half-conquered ; but across the waters he saw Doctor Crankey looking at him sternly, and by him he beheld his pale nephew, who had watched with jealous gloom the unheard discourse between himself and Grace. With a scornful smile Mr. Owen turned away. “ She is good and great,” he thought, “ but I do not want her : truly they may keep her. They are welcome.”

Grace did not look round ; she heard him depart ; at length his step ceased. She raised her eyes ;—he was gone. “ Ay go, hard heart,” she thought, “ go and never return. ’Tis better it should be so.”

CHAPTER IV.



MR. OWEN'S mind was made up; Mr. Owen was tired of a country surgeon's life, sick of Wales, burning to be off miles away from Grace Lee. She had caught but a glimpse of his mortification and shame. There was a class of men whom, if he could, Mr. Owen would have traversed the broad earth to shun, the wide class of coxcombs, male flirts, men vain of their successes with women, would-be conquerors of female hearts, and with that class he had to a certain degree identified himself. For ten days he had nursed the belief that Miss Lee was in love with him; he had luxuriated in that idea, complacently indulged in it, and she all the

time had read through him, and resented with just scorn the impertinent delusion. His brow burned to think of it; it was as much as he could bear to feel that he, John Owen, the proud cynical man of the world, had been but a fool after all. "She is right enough," he thought, on the second day after his adventure, "I know nothing of women, and nothing henceforth will I have to do with them. Before a week is over, I shall again stand in London, ready for another campaign. The last I lost through my own fault, now I change my tactics. I thought to make my way single-handed; miserable folly, what general ever won a battle alone? Even as in wealth, none become rich by their own labour, so none can succeed that make not the talents of their neighbours subservient to their own ends. Fawn and flatter I cannot, but I can take the trouble of ruling minds I disdained too much. That was the way of Napoleon. The great tyrant absorbed in himself the talent,

power, and energy of France. He did well. Some are born to rule, others to obey; he abused his power and fell justly, but it was a legitimate power for all that."

As he came to this conclusion, Mr. Owen, who had been on his daily rounds, entered his dreary dwelling and pushed open the door of his kitchen parlour. Mrs. Skelton was not alone, a young woman sat with her; on hearing the door open, she turned round, and Mr. Owen recognised Miss Lee's Phœbe. She rose on seeing him.

"If you please, sir," she said hurriedly, "I hope you will excuse the liberty, but I was alone. Doctor Crankey and Mr. James went off this morning."

"What has happened?" interrupted Owen, astonished.

"Nothing, sir, but knowing you to be Miss Lee's friend, I thought that if you would call by chance as it were, and see her."

"Is she unwell?"

"She is not well, sir."

"Has she sent for me?"

"No, sir, she would not hear of it, it is all my own doing."

Mr. Owen frowned and looked displeased. After what had passed how could he, unasked, call on Grace? It was a task for which in no sense had he a fancy. He was not mean enough to dislike her because she had humbled him, but as he had told her, he was not good enough to be so humbled often. At once he resolved not to go; sitting down, he said coldly:

"What do you suppose to be the matter with your mistress?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Phœbe, rather disconcerted, "unless that she seemed very strange yesterday."

"Nervousness."

"And that to-day she went out into the

garden and stayed there bare-headed, then came in quite flushed and hot."

"Feverishness."

"And that she is always thirsty."

"Naturally fever breeds thirst. Give her something refreshing to drink."

"Then you don't think it necessary to call, sir?" hesitatingly asked Phœbe.

"Not in the least."

Phœbe reddened and apologised. Mr. Owen, who was unfastening his cloak, heard her to the end, then calmly told her there was no harm done. She renewed her apologies and said:

"I forgot to tell you something, sir, but I suppose it is not of much consequence."

"What is it?" he asked rather impatiently. He had risen to go upstairs, and he stood with his hand on the door and his foot on the first step of the staircase.

"Oh, sir! it is nothing at all; but as she came in from the garden, Miss Lee met me in

the passage, and she said : ‘ Phœbe, why is there blood on your face ? ’ So I went off to look at myself in a glass, and bless you, sir, there was no more blood on my face than there is now.”

Mr. Owen did not answer at first, but turned slightly pale. He soon rallied, however, and said calmly :

“ I think I had better go, Phœbe ; you did well to come for me.”

He put on his cloak, took his hat and went off at once. He never spoke one word all the way. It was dusk when they reached the house of Miss Lee. Phœbe went up to the room of her mistress, then came down for Mr. Owen. “ Is she asleep ? ” he asked, pausing on the threshold after following her up. She did not answer—he entered.

Through the thin embroidered muslin curtains, he saw Grace lying dressed on a low bed ; a light burned on the table near her. Owen approached,

drew back the curtains, and bent over her. One of her hands supported her head, and was buried in her dark hair; the other hung loosely by her side; her lustrous eyes were wide open; her cheeks had the warm glow of a crimson flower; her breathing was fast and oppressed. He spoke to her, she never answered; he took her hand, she did not move; her pulse beat high, her hand was burning.

Phœbe gave him a terrified look, Mr. Owen signed her to follow him out of the room. She obeyed; he closed the door, laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked down in her face. It was a face, pretty yet firm. There were resolute lines about the mouth and brow—he read them keenly.

“Phœbe,” he said quietly, “your mistress has a fever, a contagious fever. I shall send to W—— for a nurse. You and the other servants must leave the house.”

Phœbe burst into tears. “My dear mistress,

my dear mistress," she sobbed. "Oh, sir! is there no hope?"

"No hope!" he said almost sternly. "God forbid! Why should there be no hope? What put that into your head?" Without giving her time to answer, he continued: "You had better go at once."

"No, sir, I will not go," resolutely replied Phœbe. "Harriet and Mrs. Jeremy may go; I shall stay, and no one else shall nurse Miss Lee."

"I warn you that her fever is contagious."

"I don't care; if I were to die I'll do it; my mind is made up."

"You are a good girl," he said, approvingly, "and now give me pen, paper, and ink."

"Miss Lee's desk is in her room, sir." She opened the door, he sat down to a table, wrote a prescription and a letter, sealed both, then gave them to her and bade her send them as soon as possible to the neighbouring town. She went,

leaving him alone with her mistress ; when she came back she found him restlessly pacing the narrow landing. He looked up interrogatively. Her account was brief. Harriet was gone with the letter, and was not to return ; old Mrs. Jeremy had refused to go. “ All I could get out of her,” said Phœbe, “ was ‘ dead and gone,’ ‘ dead and gone,’ and she said it in such a moaning pitiful way she made my heart turn cold, indeed she did, for though I am not surreptitious——”

“ What noise is that below ? ” interrupted Owen.

“ Oh, dear ! it is Doctor Crankey come back. If you would be so kind as to stay with Miss Lee ? ”

“ No, no, stay ; I shall go down.”

He made her enter the room, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and went down stairs. He found Doctor Crankey and his nephew in the parlour ; the former storming at the unaccountable absence of Harriet and Phœbe ; the latter silent, but evidently astonished.

“John !” cried Doctor Crankey as soon as he saw him, “can you tell me what has happened? Is the house bewitched?”

“Miss Lee is not well,” replied Owen, gravely.

“Eh ! what ails her ?”

“She has a fever.”

“Nonsense !” exclaimed Doctor Crankey, turning pale, “Grace never had a fever in her life.”

“She has one now ; and it being contagious, I took on myself to send away the servants.”

“Is it a bad fever?” asked James Crankey, anxiously.

“There are no good fevers,” drily replied Owen.

Doctor Crankey said nothing, but he turned to the door ; the hand of John Owen laid on his shoulder held him back.

“You cannot see her,” he said, decisively : “no one can see her, save Doctor Waters, myself, and Phœbe.”

"John, do not be a fool," scornfully said Doctor Crankey.

Unmoved by this taunt, Owen resumed. "I say you cannot see her, for her room door is locked and I have the key in my pocket."

The face of James Crankey darkened, and his uncle, whose hand still held the door half open, looked back in incredulous amazement.

"You have the key of Grace Lee's room door in your pocket!" he at length exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, I have. Phœbe is now with Miss Lee, and no one else must or shall enter her room."

"On whose authority do you act?"

"On my own."

This was more than the limited patience of Doctor Crankey could bear. Sternly and imperatively he demanded the key of Miss Lee's room, and with unmoved obstinacy Owen refused to deliver it to him, referring him to Doctor Waters' decision. What between his grief for the illness of

Grace, and his indignation at not being able to reach her, the old man was strangely affected. He shook his grey head at Owen, and raising his trembling hand, he muttered in a broken voice :

“ Very well, sir,—very well,—we shall see if you are master here ; we shall see.”

“ Doctor Crankey,” impatiently replied Owen, “ I protest that if Doctor Waters thinks it proper for you or any one else to see Miss Lee, I am satisfied ; in the meanwhile I think it right to remind you that her fever is contagious and that your nephew cannot leave the house too soon.”

“ True, true,” cried Doctor Crankey ; “ you must go at once, James.”

With a troubled face he turned towards his nephew ; the young man sat by a table in the shadow of the window curtains : he looked up at his uncle and smiled calmly ; but it was a smile that said : “ Heaven and earth shall not move me.” The old man knew him well, he shook his head ; Owen took his hat and left them both.

The night was dark and dreary ; a night of sleet, chill and starless ; he left the house, he walked up and down the lonely road. The cold blast drove full in his face, then died away with a low moan on the wide Atlantic. But in vain his troubled spirit sought in the war and tumult of the elements to fly from the thought that haunted him. As well might he have sought to divide his body from its shadow, or his soul from his body.

Thus passed for all—for Phœbe in the sick room, for Mr. Owen on the lonely road, for Doctor Crankey in the silent parlour—two long weary hours. At length the sound of carriage wheels announced the approach of Doctor Waters. Doctor Crankey caught a glimpse of him going up stairs with Owen, then followed a still half hour, of which, to the troubled heart of the priest waiting down below, the thirty minutes seemed so many ages. At length the physician, a grave man of austere aspect, came down.

“ Well ! ” eagerly said Doctor Crankey.

"Well, sir," slowly replied Doctor Waters, drawing on his gloves, "I agree entirely with Mr. Owen; I should not have prescribed differently; especially do I concur with his decision, no one must enter Miss Lee's room."

"But what of her, what of her?" impatiently asked Doctor Crankey, who now cared comparatively little for the right he had disputed so vehemently.

"The case is serious."

"Nonsense," interrupted the priest; "I grant she is ill, but there can be nothing to fear, you know?"

"I beg your pardon; there is something to fear," said Doctor Waters, who did not like being contradicted.

"What?" asked Doctor Crankey, almost defiantly.

"Everything."

The reply fell like lead on the old man's heart. This lonely, childless priest, vowed from his youth to the altar, to God and a solitary heart, had

gathered on one head all the affections that men bestow on many with more or less fervour. Grace was dearer to him than a wife could have been ; not dearer than a child, but a more jealously cherished because far less secure possession. "Everything !" word of terror that implied Grace might die. True, faith spoke of a glorious eternity, and the saint's immortal crown ; but if faith could cure all our sorrows, the purpose for which those sorrows were sent would never be accomplished. The arrow must pierce deep in the quivering heart, the grief must crush until the soul sickens and grows faint under the burden. Doctor Waters continued,

"Mr. Owen has, with the courtesy of a gentleman, sent for me ; very nice and proper in a young man, very ; yet I do not think it necessary to call again : Miss Lee can very safely be trusted to him ; besides, I could scarcely come often enough, and he has promised not to leave the house : there may be a crisis. Good evening, sir."

With a formal bow he left. Doctor Crankey remained stunned and mute. A step on the staircase roused him; through the open door he saw John Owen coming down. He went out to him, and laying his hand on the surgeon's arm, he said—

“John, Doctor Waters thinks you a clever man; what do you think of her?”

“What did he say?” asked Owen, instead of answering.

“He said there was everything to fear,” indignantly replied Doctor Crankey.

“I do not think so,” rather sharply said Mr. Owen; and without giving Doctor Crankey time to put more questions, he walked off, and leaving the house, wandered away whither no one knew.

For three days it rained heavily, and Mr. Owen was scarcely to be seen by any save Phœbe, when he entered her mistress's room to see his still unconscious patient, and renew to the faithful

nurse his strict and well-obeyed orders to let no one in. How and where he spent his time, he alone could have told; he slept in an old guest-room at the back of the house, and troubled neither Doctor Crankey nor his nephew with his company. Hope is obstinate; the priest, spite of Doctor Waters, whom he impatiently called a fool, persisted in saying Grace would and should recover; yet he went about the house pale and restless, meeting none save his taciturn nephew, and vainly seeking John Owen to extract from him some more satisfactory intelligence of Grace than Phœbe could give; the surgeon seemed to have become invisible; at length on the evening of the third day they met.

Mr. Owen had but just come in; he had wandered away for miles in the country, and he was wet and tired. He entered the back parlour to rest awhile; it was the usual sitting-room of Grace, and looked as if she had that moment left it; there was her chair, her frame stood by it,

with the needle still in the canvass; a kid glove that seemed to have left her hand but a few minutes, marked the page of an open octavo volume.

“John, John Owen!” said a low stern voice. Thus adjured Mr. Owen looked up. On the hearth before him stood Doctor Crankey: his face was pale and wild; his wet hair clung to his sunken cheeks; his garments were heavy with rain; the staff on which he leaned was sullied with earth.

“John Owen,” he said again, and his voice rose stern and loud, like that of a prophet uttering denunciation. “John Owen, there is, or rather there was, an Italian sailor lying ill in a cabin on the mountain—do you know him?”

“So he is dead,” slowly said Owen. “Well, I knew he could not live! What of him?” and he looked up at Doctor Crankey with something like defiance.

“What of him?” said the priest, raising his arm, and speaking in a broken tone, “why that

he sent for me, that I went to him this evening, that I saw him slowly expire ! What of him, John Owen ! Why, that you took Grace to that cabin on the night of the snow-storm ; that she spent the whole of that ill-fated night in that plague-struck dwelling ! ”

“ Yes,” gravely replied Owen, “ it is as you say.”

“ You confess it,” exclaimed Doctor Crankey, in a transport of indignant grief ; “ you confess that you have been the miserable means of poisoning Grace Lee with this most fatal plague—you confess it ? ”

“ I repeat that it is as you say. I will add that Miss Lee’s attack is slight ; that I have every hope—”

“ Hope ! ” passionately interrupted Doctor Crankey. “ You dare talk of hope and her life to me. Man, give me certainty, or give me nothing.”

“ God alone can do that,” gloomily answered Owen.

“ And God alone can forgive you, I cannot,” cried Doctor Crankey, raising his trembling hands. And feeling that if he stayed, it should be to utter some passionate denunciation on the destroyer of Grace, he turned away, and abruptly left him.

Yes, it was so ; John Owen, unconscious then of danger, or of the turn the sick sailor’s disease was taking, and unaccustomed to fear for himself, had brought Miss Lee to that home, of which the shelter was more terrible than all the wrath of the snow-storm. The subtle and mysterious contagion that had not touched the aged nurse, that disdained Mr. Owen in all the strength of life, had penetrated and poisoned the very being of Grace. And he had never so much as suspected it until a coincidence between one of the symptoms described by Phœbe, and what he had observed in the sick sailor, suddenly brought to his mind a dread and fatal suspicion. It became conviction when he saw Miss Lee, and from that

moment all peace had left him. It was not that he thought her in positive danger; but he had been rash to guilt, and he needed the reproaches of none to feel it keenly. Daily, hourly he was haunted with the thought that an unfavourable turn might occur: that Grace might grow worse, much worse; the rest was a blank he did not dare to fill up. That she should die was a thing to be borne; but that she should die and he be the cause, was misery to think of. And Mr. Owen would not think of it; and to a certain degree he succeeded in quelling that tormenting thought. To save the life he had so imprudently endangered, he resolved to stay by Miss Lee, watch every turn of her disease, and snatch every chance from death. More neither he nor other man could do.

The duty was joyless and dreary. With a reluctance he could not conquer, he entered her house, her room, or approached her sick bed. With relief he left her, and not merely her, but

everything that could remind him of her existence. It was not without a strong effort to overcome this feeling that he had entered her favourite parlour. Scarcely was the priest gone when he, too, abruptly forsook a room haunted with her presence. Yet he had to go up-stairs, to go to her room, and confront the reality of which he so shunned the remembrance. He did it, but with a secret revolt against the hated necessity. For once he was spared the infliction: Phœbe met him on the threshold; "her mistress was fast asleep; should she waken her?"

"By no means," quickly replied Owen; and he hastened away with a sense of relief that amounted to pleasure.

He was not long allowed to indulge in such feelings. Doctor Crankey fell ill; his visit to the dying sailor bore its fruits: a violent headache ended in the fatal fever. Poor Phœbe, who was already exhausted with attending on her sick mistress, nearly lost heart at this new calamity.

James Crankey wanted to wait on his uncle, but Mr. Owen sharply told him he did not want a third patient; he sent to W—— for a nurse; none could be found. Phœbe, instead of sinking further into the Slough of Despond, suddenly took courage.

“My mind is made up,” she said resolutely; “I’ll wait on my dear mistress, and on Doctor Crankey, too; but Mr. James is only a nuisance in the house. I’ll lock him out.”

Phœbe said it, and Phœbe did it; she refused to cook a morsel for Mr. James Crankey, and starved him out of the house in search of a stray meal. When he applied for admittance, Mr. James Crankey found every door closed against him. In vain he knocked and rang. Phœbe, looking out from the first-floor window, sharply informed him that she would not work herself to death to please him, and that she had quite enough on her hands as it was. She wound up with a pithy lecture on the sin of obstinacy, and

finally added, in a milder tone, that he might ring twice a day to know how his uncle and Miss Lee were; with which she shut the window in his face.

Doctor Crankey was much worse than Grace. His fever was stronger, and he gave Phœbe infinitely more trouble than her unconscious mistress. Mr. Owen, who liked this girl's courage and devotedness, would willingly have relieved her from the burden of one patient, but the poor priest, whose mind wandered, fell into such fits of raving fury whenever he caught sight of his face, that unless to ascertain his condition, Owen could not enter his room; in that of Grace he could render no assistance. At length Phœbe, worn out with watching, could bear no more. Mr. Owen, struck with her haggard aspect, again sent for a nurse; this time one was fortunately found. On the day that followed her arrival Phœbe took to her bed; nothing more serious than fatigue ailed her, and old Mrs. Jeremy supplied the little attendance she needed.

Mrs. Martin was the best nurse in W——. To her Mr. Owen thought he could safely leave his patient; he gave her every necessary direction, and less than ever he entered the sick room. Yet, remembering that she did for hire what Phœbe had done for love, he compelled himself to remain more within a house of which the very atmosphere was stifling; the parlour, the drawing-room, he shunned like pestilence: they were haunted; but there was a half-empty apartment on the groundfloor that gave out on the garden; there he chiefly sat, for there, to his knowledge, he had never seen Grace. And there Scamp, who had conceived a strange canine affection for Mr. Owen, often kept him company.

One evening his mood was unusually bitter. With angry fervour he vowed, once he was free to leave the house, never to come near its mistress. "When she is well again," he thought, "for she must and shall recover;—I cannot be laid under the insufferable burden of her death, to be

haunted for ever with her pale face ;—when she is well again, we shall part, no more I trust to meet. Why had I ever anything to do with her? When I first saw her in this house, did not a secret something—an antipathy to which I could give no name, for which I could find no reason, warn me that of all women this one was the last I should meddle with? Even when we most seemed to agree, was there not a secret jar—a sort of contest between us—that told us both we could not be too far asunder? Would I had never seen her dark face, in which, like a fool, I began the other day to find a sort of beauty. She may be good, gifted, ten times better than I am, handsome to the taste of some ; I care not, I do not like her.” And he felt renewing, in all its strength, the early aversion with which it had been Miss Lee’s misfortune to inspire him. It had slumbered, half-conquered by the many high and noble qualities he had seen in Grace ; but some feelings are difficult, perhaps impossible, to

eradicate; this might be one. The more he felt that he had wronged Grace; that to wrong her had added the deep though involuntary injury which now laid her unconscious on a sick bed; the more he longed to blot from his life all that related to her. He would have given worlds never to have known, seen, or heard of her; and if, in that luckless moment, his dislike did not turn into downright hate, it was because, spite of many faults, he could not be so mean. Yet not without effort, not without the secret loathing of one drinking some distasteful potion, did he compel himself, as the time came round, to seek her room. His knock received no reply; he conjectured the nurse to be asleep, and pushing the door open he entered. Mrs. Martin's chair was vacant; the night-lamp burned dimly; he approached the sick bed.

Alas! she against whom he so proudly rebelled, lay there with ardent eyes and parched lips, faint with the thirst of hours. On seeing him, the first word she had uttered for days

broke from her: "Water!" He turned round quickly, and saw on the table her glass still full. He held it for her whilst she drank with an eagerness that pierced his heart. Had she, whose table had once fed so many, had she known thirst? Had she been waiting for his hand to minister unto her sick wants? Oh, strange and bitter contrast between the past and the present, between his harsh thoughts and her miserable state! He looked down at her with a troubled gaze. She was suffering, for heavy dewdrops gathered fast on her brow; he wiped them, and smoothed away her dishevelled hair; spite of her pain she half smiled; with sudden hope he stooped and said eagerly,

"Grace, Miss Lee, do you know me? speak"—But he won neither reply nor token of recognition. Long and vainly he looked in her eyes. With a pang he felt he might search them for hours and never startle her; gone was the time when that look, shy though free, would sink

beneath his with the mingled modesty and pride of woman. He sat down by her, and took in his her listless and passive hand; then he saw that she again wanted a drink; without rising he gave her one. How slowly, drop by drop, he had to pour through her parted lips the draught that could only cool for awhile her burning fever; how heavy felt the head he was obliged to raise; how it sank back on his arm pale and languid. He turned his head away; he could not bear the sight; he was hard, but he was not pitiless; his heart was arid, but it was not cold. When after awhile he compelled himself to look again, the eyes of Grace were closed, and her face lay turned towards him in all the stillness of deep sleep. He would not waken her by changing his attitude: and thus he sat by the lonely couch with the head of Grace resting on his arm, and her hand in his.

“And is it thus, indeed!” he thought, looking down at her. “Is she, whom I once saw all but

worshipped, now left to the cares of a mercenary and a stranger? To my care! Is mine the hand that should clasp hers? Is mine the arm on which her head should rest? Am I the one who should watch by her sick bed? Faithless sister; faithless friend; faithless lovers, do ye all leave her to me? Where are ye who once pined for the least tokens of her favour, who so often praised the beauty of the perfect hands, who compared those tresses to the raven's wing, who, when you wanted to speak of fine eyes, could only say, 'almost as fine as Miss Lee's?' One who never prized these fleeting charms, even when he secretly triumphed in the fancied consciousness that with one word he could make them and their owner his, is now their sole guardian. Unhappy girl, forsaken even of Providence! I have wronged her friendship, betrayed her trust, perilled her life. I have disliked her to the verge of hatred, detested the mere thoughts of coming near her, and pitiless

Fate throws her in my arms, sleeping and unconscious.”

But if Fate was pitiless, was he? Oh, Pity! dangerous Pity! Dangerous to all, but most to the proud of heart, not in vain were you with him in the lonely vigils of that night!

When the nurse wakened from her long sleep by Doctor Crankey's bedside and returned to Miss Lee's room, she was perturbed to find Mr. Owen there. He said nothing to her; he neither remarked on nor reproved her absence, but from that night he took wholly upon himself the duty she had so grossly neglected. Every half-hour of the day and night brought him to the bedside of Grace, to give her with his own hands the soothing drink that was all his art could now devise for her. Mrs. Martin resented this interference with her rights, but she was too conscious of her derelictions to dare to complain. Mr. Owen was strong, and he bore without seeming fatigued this incessant vigil, but it acted

on him inwardly though not visibly; it strained and quickened, even to pain, every faculty and sense of his being. He was an imaginative man, and though firm health and nerves of iron tamed and imprisoned the power within the limits of every-day life, there were moments when it broke, free from all bondage, and flew on ardent wing farther than eye could follow. Little by little, day by day, he allowed reality to forsake him. He forswore it like a thing he had never known. He lived beyond it in a feverish but charmed circle, and he saw not that every day it grew more narrow and more burning. At length he woke.

The silent night was waning; the nurse slept in her chair, and Grace was at the height of ardent fever. Mr. Owen took the lamp, raised it slowly and looked down at her. The proud girl who had never suffered even a look too prolonged, now lay unconscious beneath his gaze. Fever gave her strange beauty; her

head resting partly on her right shoulder hung like a bright flower whose heart some hidden worm devours; her long hair swept the floor; her eyes shone soft through all their fire; a smile of singular sweetness played around her red lips; her beautiful arms were folded across her bosom with languid grace. The heavy quilt that was thrown over her, had fallen back a little, and her feet white and pure as marble, lay crossed and bare. Everything in her betrayed the noble though delicate grace of form of perfect womanhood. Yet even in her unconsciousness, she preserved the modest dignity of one whom a glance too free could not profane,—of a sinless Eve wakening slowly under the gaze of wondering spirits. John Owen looked long at her, and found in looking a dangerous sweetness. There was in her whole aspect something lovely and living, of which his eyes could not weary; he looked and drank deep draughts of a keen pleasure blending with

a pain as keen. She was in danger and he knew it. That frame was beautiful, but it might soon lie inanimate and cold; dust might soon cover everything he now gazed on, and death sully with his embrace a form as pure as it was lovely. He put down the lamp; with a passionate pang he thought: "I wish she would not look so beautiful. I wish I could detect in her signs of decay, and not that fulness of life which makes it so strange a torment to think she may die."

Life was and had always been an attribute of Grace. This dark daughter of earth had received the gift from her mother at her birth; she lived not coldly, but as a bright flame burns—glad though self-consuming. Even now she looked no lovely statue of repose. Fever had enchanted her into mute stillness, but not into slumber; her life it is true had left this world and retreated to where none could follow, but to look at her was to feel that it was still

quick and intense. And to John Owen it seemed as if never before he had so felt the exquisite beauty of life. The sense of existence, of deep brief joys, of all that man's heart and soul can snatch below of delightful and entrancing, thronged to him in a few rapid moments. Sweet to pain is at all times that sense of overflowing life ; but there are times when pain becomes torture, and to him this was one. Oh ! that out of his excess he might fill up all she wanted ! That their two lives blending in one stream might go down full and rejoicing to the depths of Time !

He turned away trembling and troubled. He took a few steps to leave the room, and a charm both bitter and sweet, brought him back to her sick bed, and bound him there. A fever as subtle as that which wasted her life, crept in his blood, and invaded his whole being. Remorse had yielded to Pity, Pity had slowly melted into involuntary Tenderness, Tenderness

now suddenly vanished, absorbed in feelings more deep and impetuous.

Ay, he loved her. How?—why? Ask not that which he never knew. Little matters it in what guise, or in what hour, all-conquering Love came to this cynical man of the world—to this Timon, who railed at all, and at himself first of all: suffice it to say that he was conquered. One thought absorbed the keen brain that had grasped at every thought; a few feet square now bounded the desires of him who had found the wide world narrow; out of a sick girl's silent presence, he could not breathe freely; a woman who could not give him a word, a smile, a look, subdued the proud heart that had yielded nothing to her waking and conscious hours. As he now looked at her in the agonising suspense of a gamester watching his last stake, she taught him the fond sweetness of hope and the terrors of despair. She taught him that from himself the centre of his being was now

removed to her, and that her narrow sick bed held his world and his all: deep fall for a soul so haughty !

And by that sick bed on the third evening after this, he sat with moist brow and quivering lips; Doctor Crankey was slowly recovering; Phœbe had already risen to see her mistress. Spring softness was in the air and spring flowers bloomed in the garden, and for three nights and three days John Owen had watched Grace sinking into a stupor, from which he knew of no wakening.

“I think Miss Lee is better, sir,” whispered Mrs. Martin, “she is going asleep.”

He did not reply; he rose abruptly and left the room. He went down to the garden; the night was chill and a pale moon shone in the sky above the mountains. Restlessly he paced up and down the paths and alleys that had so often known the lighter step of Grace. But there are moments when the fierce thing, Grief,

has to be kept at bay with all the might of will, and now he would not pause to think; he would not look into that strange dreary void, a world where she should not be.

“Dead and gone! dead and gone!” said a low moaning voice near him, “dead and gone!”

He stood still and looked; he saw old Mrs. Jeremy; she gave him a dreary look and went on muttering, “Dead and gone!”

“Dead and gone!” he repeated to himself.

The thought he had fled from had waylaid him like a spectre in that solitary place. His heart sickened, and his blood seemed to flow chill in his veins. He looked up; a light burned in the window of Grace Lee. He watched it as if it were that of her life. Suddenly it vanished. Swiftly he re-entered the house; with a few rapid strides he reached her room.

Nothing had happened, but Mrs. Martin, seeing her patient asleep, had gone to Doctor Crankey’s

room, and left the light burning outside Miss Lee's door. Mr. Owen took it, entered and hastily went up to Grace.

She had fallen into an oppressive slumber, and breathed painfully, with closed eyes. Life seemed ebbing from her fast, and sleep to lead her gently to the cold embrace of death. He sat down by her. Bending over her, he drew towards him her unconscious head until it rested on his shoulder; one of her hands he clasped in his; he passed around her the arm that was free, and laid his hand where it could wait and watch the last feeble beatings of her heart. His own heart, wrung and tortured with a thousand pangs, tasted in that hour the last drop of bitterness. Yet, since die she must, he would not have had her die elsewhere than in that despairing embrace. It seemed to him,—happy ye whose souls have never been pierced with thoughts like these,—it seemed to him something like the shadow of Love's promises, that his bosom should be her death-bed;

and, stooping over her in a passion of grief and tenderness, he pressed on her pale lips a long kiss, sanctified by sorrow and by death.

Thus passed time which he did not measure: and the pulse of Grace still throbbed, though feebly, and her heart beat with returning strength. He bent over her in breathless suspense; her eyes opened slowly, she looked at him and smiled. Through the portals of death that long slumber had brought her back to life.

"You know me?" he whispered. "You know me, Grace?"

"Oh yes, I know you," she replied, still looking at him; "you have watched by me night and day,—you have given me drink when I was thirsty. I knew you well."

"Then who am I?"

She smiled and did not answer.

"Tell me my name!" he entreated.

"What's in a name?" asked Grace, still smiling.

He looked down at her, happy, yet perplexed. Did she know him? She had wakened in his arms without wonder, and she lay there calm as a child.

She closed her eyes, smiled to herself, and said,

“Oh! man of little faith, I know more than your name; I have watched—I have seen—”

She did not finish the sentence. She was fast asleep.

Tears of joy, tears which grief had not wrung from him, fell on her face. Again he kissed her; this time with all a happy lover's fondness, then, hearing Mrs. Martin leaving Doctor Crankey's room, he reluctantly withdrew from Grace, and, unwilling to betray feelings he could not control, he abruptly left the room as the nurse entered.

He again went down into the garden; the moon waned in the west, and in the yellow east blushed rosy dawn. Pure and aërial rose the

lines of the mountains on the clear sky. The freshness of dew reposed upon their rocky brows and green slopes; their white waterfalls and cascades seemed to have slumbered through the dark night, and to flow with all the freshness of awakening life. Morning, beautiful morning! beautiful, even in the dull city, above a sea of serried roofs,—are thy footsteps anywhere so lovely or so fresh as on the mountains? But a careless eye now gazed on all thy beauties. Mr. Owen sat down on a wooden bench near the house. An hour before he had paced that garden in all the restlessness of grief; he now reposed there in the seducing languor of joy. He could not think; he could only feel. Grace was saved: Grace lived, and would still live on. Death had retreated conquered, and before her spread endless length of days. A delightful, though enervating sensation came over him. He felt unstrung, weak as a child, and as happy.

He soon rose and followed a cool garden path. For once a calm vision broke on his troubled spirit; he saw a woman serene in her ardour, a woman who was his wife, dwelling somewhere in a quiet home, a home that was his. Near her the fever of his life seemed to grow still, and peace, like dew, to fall on his parched heart. For the first time he conceived the meaning of Happiness, a word he had often derided. Images, all softness and repose, gathered around him in these young hours of a first love. Calm prelude to a long storm!

CHAPTER V.

SPRING had come like a young summer. The day had been soft and mild. The sun set beyond the Atlantic warm and splendid. Grace stood once more in her garden; her hand held some of its early flowers; under her feet she felt earth and green grass; above her spread a cloudless sky, and everywhere around her rose the soft blue mountains that enclosed her home. Her whole soul overflowed with gratitude, tenderness, and prayer. With the delight of a captive released, she breathed once more the pure evening breeze; with all the gladness of returning life, she gazed up at that broad round sun, whose glorious radiance embraced

heavens and earth. Its ardent light fell on her up-raised face, and played around her whole figure. A morning gown of white cashmere fell from her shoulders to her feet in the soft and graceful folds of woven wool. With her flowers in her hand, with her parted lips, and rapt eyes, she looked like some Delphian priestess worshipping, even in his setting, her god of light and song.

So thought, at least, John Owen, who stood by Grace, as wrapt in her as she in sky and setting sun. As many a profane worshipper of old thought more of the dark-eyed priestess than of the god of the matchless lyre and the sounding silver bow; so, alas, in gazing on a frail woman's face, on the creature of a day, his eyes took more delight than in all the beauties of his mother earth, than in the eternal heavens themselves with all their myriads of suns and worlds. She was not beautiful, not even in his lover's eyes, but what the heart holds dear, sight

and sense, must ever charm, and sweet as drink is to the thirsty, it now was to him to look at this dark girl.

The sun had set, and he had left her; her good-night still rang in his ear: the touch of her hand still lingered warm on his. His path lay through wild mountain solitudes, yet he walked not alone, for with him walked Love, Fear, and Hope, mightiest of all the spirits that haunt the heart and soul of man. The night was clear—a night of countless stars that glittered above peaks still white with winter snows; loosened torrents flowed in their invisible beds, with a vague, rushing sound. Throughout all nature breathed a sense of languor and repose. Oh! that, when nature sleeps thus, the heart of man, too, might find peace!

John Owen was not happy; but that, indeed, he had never been. With him the most peaceful elements became all storm; and if some love quietly, experience told him that he was not

of them. Passions of which the heart is conscious, progress far more rapidly than they that slumber hidden in its recesses. Knowledge is dangerous; for the mind, ever quick and subtle, renders eager and craving feelings that might have long lain dormant, content with little. The first wakening words of Grace had inspired him with hopes nothing in her subsequent behaviour had confirmed. He soon knew that she had uttered them in some waking dream, of which not even the memory remained behind. Yet, spite of this, he found it pleasant to see her slowly recover, to assist her down stairs, to watch some colour return to her cheek, and her wasted form recover the fulness of health. All these things at first yielded him a calm charm, and gave him a sense of tranquil happiness that quickly faded away. His mind, antipathetic to repose, could not dwell long in such still regions. James Crankey shunned his presence like pestilence; Doctor Crankey had

that day left Wales on some unexplained errand ; he had seen Grace alone, she had been unusually kind and friendly. Yet his craving heart was not contented. To see her had at first been pleasure enough ; then this pleasure had turned into pain, yet a pain he could not do without ; a sort of thirst never sated, let him drink draughts ever so full. When passion has reached that stage it turns tyrant ; and, to his cost, John Owen felt it.

In what careless moment had pride, that sleepless guardian of his heart, forgotten her ceaseless vigils, to let in Grace ? How came it to pass that the strong and living self-love, which lay coiled up in its folds like the spirit of evil, was like him too crushed and conquered by a mere daughter of Eve ? Useless question. Love came not to him whilst he was in the world, engaged in its struggles, absorbed in its ambition ; like a wary archer the God bided his time, and piercing this proud heart with

a resistless shaft, he flew away, leaving solitude, that cherisher of all strong and deep passions, to pour her sweet and slow poison in the wound. He who had refused to love Grace because she was generous, gifted, and good, now loved her for none of these things, but spite of himself, and because he could not help it. He had refused her the calmer affection which blesses many a human lot, and now the blind passion that stings in the very midst of bliss, laid his pride in the dust, and flung to the winds his boasted liberty. ✍

A woman had become to him that something better and nobler than days following on days, and years crowding on years, which need not always be love or passion, but without which, whatever name it may take, life is as dull as a sunless day. In this where was the cause of torment? not in this, but in himself, in his long hardness of heart, in his thirty-three long and arid years. Oh! it is well that passions

should come to youth, for youth, spendthrift-like, gets rid of them quickly, and does not hoard them up for age. Life was not meant to be spent in their alternate tumult and rest; a man's mature years have other tasks and other hopes appointed unto them than the thousand idle delights and more idle fears of mortal love. Passion quelled by a tyrant pride, had slept within John Owen through late youth and early manhood; she now woke young, fresh, and eager, after her long slumber; she might have charmed the boy, but she tormented the man.

Never had he felt it more keenly than as he walked home on that calm night of early spring. He was tossed between passion that bade him speak, and pride that told him to be silent; and the contest was not over when he reached his dwelling. Great was Mr. Owen's surprise as he entered his parlour, there to see the Reverend Doctor Crankey quietly seated by his fireside, and by the dim candlelight calmly reading one

of the legal works that once had belonged to Miss Lee, and which her gift had made the property of John Owen. Doctor Crankey, seemingly unconscious that he ought to have been miles away, composedly closed the volume on his knee, and holding out his hand, said kindly :

“ Well, John, how are you to-night ? ”

Doctor Crankey’s illness had produced some good effects ; it had so softened his rancour towards Owen, that no trace of the feeling seemed to remain behind.

“ And so,” he continued, without waiting for his reply, “ and so you are reading Grace Lee’s law books. There never was such a strange girl ; at seventeen her learning and her piety might have graced a Benedictine monk. Yet no woman, then or now, could excel her in skill with her needle. Marvellous were the chasubles, the surplices, the carpets, which she worked for church and altar. Truly that girl is a mystery to me, for with all this there never was one of

her frivolous sex fonder of dress, pleasure, and admiration than Grace Lee, nor yet so little their slave. When she lived in such splendour, that many a princess might have envied her, I know she slept with a dead man's skull in her room. When her table was spread with every luxury, I know she often fasted; yet she wore a cheerful face, and dressed richly, and perfumed her hair, lest she should be like unto the Pharisee who gloried in his austerities. Thus in the midst of her seeming worldliness, did she preserve herself pure and undefiled from the contamination of this world. Of her alms I speak not; she was rich, and nature has made her generous, but of that charity which never allowed her to say or hear evil said of others, what shall I, a sinner, say? Truly Heaven was bountiful unto her; it endowed her with rich gifts, with a mind and soul capable of all things, save evil; it made her great and magnificent as a queen, and meek and humble as a woman."

The priest uttered this panegyric in a slow,

meditative tone, with his head bowed on his breast, and concluded it with a deep sigh. Then with one of his usual abrupt transitions, he suddenly added, "And what do you think of her health, John; she is not strong enough for it, is she? It would surely kill her?"

"Kill her!" echoed Owen, startled, "what would?"

"Why I told you—what else am I here for?"

"Sir, you told me nothing."

"Say you were not listening. But I told you, which Grace must not know on any account. I have your word, John, have I not?"

"Doctor Crankey, I entreat you to be plain: what am I not to repeat?"

Without heeding him Doctor Crankey continued: "Mind you impress on her that she is weak, that exertion would kill her, that her health is shattered for ever; in short, that it is little less than madness in her to think of becoming a sister of mercy. You understand?"

Mr. Owen was standing by the mantel-piece; he had to lean on it, stunned with a blow so sudden and so unexpected: and Doctor Crankey went on explaining that if he thought Grace equal to the labour, he would surrender her willingly and cheerfully to the service of God; but that feeling convinced neither her health nor her strength fitted her for a life so arduous, it was his manifest duty to prevent her from embracing it: then he added many useless arguments to convince Owen of this truth, and at length he ceased, waiting for a reply that came not.

Mr. Owen had scarcely heeded him. A thought had pierced his heart like a sharp knife, and it bled inly. He stood with compressed lips and bent eyes; his falling hair half shaded his face. Doctor Crankey looked at him surprised; then indignant at his silence.

“You do not seem to think it worth your while to reply, sir,” he said, austere.

Mr. Owen looked up, and thus compelled to

“speak, he replied with much bitterness, “I did not know Miss Lee was mystical!”

“Mystical!” cried Doctor Crankey, firing at the imputation. “Do you call it mystical, sir, to breathe the pestilential atmosphere of an hospital; to be servant,—ay, to be handmaiden to the refuse of humanity—to the dregs of society? Is that mysticism in *your* opinion?”

Owen did not answer.

Doctor Crankey angrily continued: “And perhaps, sir, you think this mystical mode of life would agree with Miss Lee?”

By this, John Owen had fully recovered; he had taken a rapid view of the case, and a sudden but bold resolve.

“Doctor Crankey,” he said, “you ask me to help you. I will; but will you help me? I want to marry Miss Lee.”

He stood with his arms folded across his chest, and his piercing black eyes fastened full on the face of Doctor Crankey.

“ You,” said the priest, pushing back his chair with amazement, “ you ! ”

“ Yes, I truly ; why not ? ”

“ You, sir ; who do not think Grace handsome —not even pretty : who think her what most people would call plain.”

“ So she is,” replied Owen, half smiling ; “ what of it ? ”

“ You, sir, who if you took a wife should like her to be handsome.”

“ On the rule, that contraries are good in matrimony, I thought so once ; I now think otherwise. But that is not the question ; will you help me ? ”

“ No,” honestly and resolutely replied the priest, “ I tell you to your face, sir, that you may change your mind, but that I do not change mine. Never through advice or influence of mine shall Grace Lee become your wife. Good-night.”

He rose abruptly ; Mr. Owen detained him.

"It is too late for you to go now," he said, looking at his watch; "Mrs. Skelton shall prepare a bed for you. Spend the night here: we need not be better friends to-morrow."

Doctor Crankey growled half suspiciously, yet he yielded, for as Owen had truly said, it was too late to proceed on his journey, and he had no wish to startle Grace by returning to her house.

Mr. Owen did his best to entertain his guest, and he succeeded; for, as we have already said, Nature had given him the power to please, and if he seldom exercised it, he none the less possessed it. In vain the old man saw through his intent; he could not help feeling the power and the charm. Yet what he most felt was what Owen least sought to show—his ardent love for Grace Lee.

"Such," internally philosophised the priest, "such is humanity. Even my poor boy nephew is not so madly fond of Grace as this hard cynical man of the world. Yet for all that, John Owen,

you shall not have her if I can prevent you.” But passion is strong, and before the evening was over Doctor Crankey had been talked into a very different mood. It had been clearly proved to him that unless Grace married, she would assuredly take the first opportunity of embracing a religious life ; that his nephew she never would marry ; and that, spite the difference of religion, spite his obscure poverty, it was actually desirable that she should become Mr. Owen’s wife. He pledged himself to win a position, a fortune, and a name, and to love her with a passion of enduring strength, and though his word was the sole security he gave, Doctor Crankey believed him. Half convinced he looked up, and said, with a sigh,

“And so, John, you expect me to give up to you that which I am reluctant to give up to Heaven. And pray when you have her, what remains to me ? ”

“Everything you have now,” calmly replied

Owen. "Why should not you live with us? We both have been your pupils, and if I am not much to boast of, yet she, dear creature, who knows Greek I will be bound far better than I do—"

"Indeed then she does," interrupted Doctor Crankey with his usual bluntness.

"Let her; and may you both read Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, if such is your fancy. Do not imagine me such a Goth as to interfere with these learned pleasures. Heaven forbid!"

Doctor Crankey did not reply at once; he was absorbed in thoughts known to God and his own heart. At length he looked up, and said gravely:

"Be it so: win her if you can: if I can I will help you." And his extended hand ratified the league and treaty.

Mr. Owen gave up his room to his guest, and stayed up the whole night, meditating by the fireside. He had once, on an excursion to France, seen some sisters of charity. Grace, clad in their

black and white habit, now haunted him; in vain he indignantly tried to drive away the irritating vision: it still came back, ever more tormenting. At length pale dawn entered the room, where he sat by a dying fire and a flickering light, and day put an end to this feverish vigil.

Doctor Crankey left early; as soon as he was gone, Mr. Owen proceeded to the dwelling of Grace Lee.

He found her at the end of the garden, looking forth at the broad sea; by her stood James Crankey; on seeing Mr. Owen he abruptly turned away. Without heeding this, Grace received her visitor with her usual freedom and cordiality. Mr. Owen remained silent and moody. He felt that between him and her heart lay a whole invisible world to cross and to conquer.

"Timon, what ails thee?" at length asked Grace, struck with his manner.

"Nothing; I am thinking of going to London; what do you say to that?"

"You will do well," was her calm reply; "look at that magnificent sea."

"I think to stay a year at least. What may not a year bring forth? Where will you be in a year?" he added, suddenly turning on her.

"Why here, of course," answered Grace surprised. Mr. Owen, too, was surprised. What did Doctor Crankey mean?

"You have no thoughts of leaving Wales," he resumed.

"Not the least."

"Or this house."

"I firmly hope to die in it."

"Doctor Crankey has been dreaming," thought Mr. Owen, and his very heart was troubled with joy to think so. Grace, who was watching him, saw by his changing face that some mystery lay hidden in all this, and in her direct questioning way, she said:

"Mr. Owen, Doctor Crankey has been speaking to you; what has he said?"

He neither would nor could conceal the truth. Grace heard him with a warm blush, that deepened as he spoke.

"And so," she said, "from a few vague words which I dropped the other day, Doctor Crankey thought that, he told you so, and you believed it! Once for all, Mr. Owen, believe me when I say to you that such a thought never came near me. 'Tis not my vocation. And so you think of going to London," she added with an abrupt transition. "Indeed, Mr. Owen, you never had a wiser thought. Go soon, go quickly."

He looked at her with sparkling eyes. She was a part of his ambition; the dearest and the best.

"Go soon," she said again.

"Fix the day yourself."

"Then, be it a week hence."

"A week hence let it be." And he spoke of other things.

As we are, so we love ; and in John Owen love was strong. To part from Grace was a keen pang. Yet he was the last man to linger once his mind was made up. On the very day he had fixed Mr. Owen had bid Grace Lee adieu.

Their parting was brief and calm ; too calm, he bitterly felt. In vain he hoped for some sign of emotion, for some token of regret. Miss Lee neither betrayed one nor showed the other.

Abruptly Mr. Owen left the house, threw himself on the horse that had brought him to her door, and rode off on the road to W——, irritated and unhappy. “She does not care a rush for me,” he thought ; “not one. With a smile she saw me depart. Oh ! Grace—Grace Lee, hard is the lot that compels me to love you.”

He relaxed his speed, and for a while he bared his burning brow to the cool night air. For it was night now—a dark night of threatening rain, that lowered on his path. Yet, spite the obscurity, he saw some dark moving object on

the road that kept up with his horse, and he distinctly heard a deep and regular breathing. Seized with a sudden suspicion he reined in. "Scamp!" he said. The Newfoundland barked, and bounded joyously. Mr. Owen stooped to pat his rough head; Scamp licked his hand. "The dog is kinder than the mistress," he thought, a little bitterly; but when he wanted to get rid of his companion, and ordered him home, Scamp refused to obey. Mr. Owen threatened and coaxed alternately, to no purpose. Scamp hung his tail at the menace, and wagged it at the coaxing, but did not stir. "It were a mortal pity such a noble creature should be lost," thought Owen; and though he had reached the outskirts of W——, and knew that by returning he should miss the train, he resolved to ride back with Scamp to Miss Lee's house. As he approached it his heart beat with involuntary emotion, but the feeling quickly subsided. The dwelling he had left so quiet and so silent was

now astir with life and light ; the crimson drawing-room curtains glowed red and warm in the dark night, and gay voices came forth on the air. Mr. Owen did not lose time in wonder. He passed the open gate, alighted, fastened his horse to the iron railings, and troubling himself no longer with Scamp, he went up to the house-door. It stood open ; he heard voices, but he saw no one. He entered a small parlour on his right ; it gave access to a private staircase that led to the drawing-room ; he hastened up, and in a few seconds a velvet hanging alone separated him from Miss Lee and her guests. Then, indeed, he cooled down to remember that his mud-stained travelling attire was scarcely fit for company. He drew the curtain a little aside, and looked unseen at a gay group, or rather his eyes sought amongst them but one form and one face.

She was dressed not with the splendour, but with all the elegance of old times. She wore

a deep yellow silk, warm in hue, and trimmed with black lace and velvet ; it became her ; she looked well, almost handsome. She sat back in a dark crimson chair, against which her head reclined half languidly ; her black lace mantilla, mingling with long glossy curls, descended on her neck and shoulders ; a bouquet of magnificent flowers lay on her lap ; her left hand held a delicate ivory fan, which she used slowly. Mr. Rashleigh Rashleigh stood leaning on the back of her chair ; he spoke to her in low tones ; she replied in the same subdued key. Her eyes sparkled ; there was a warm flush on her cheek, and a smile on her lips. With a jealous pang Mr. Owen felt that not for him were the rich and elegant toilet, the lady's grace, the woman's looks and smiles. He watched her resentfully. She seemed gay and happy, yet she thought him miles away. Thus she bore the parting that had wrung and tortured his heart. Unable to look on, he

went down to the garden. Lights in the dining-room showed him it was a dinner party Miss Lee was giving; he construed the simple fact in every manner that could torment him; she was re-entering the world; she was going to contract those ties she had forsworn. With jealous anger he thought of Rashleigh Rashleigh leaning over her chair, and her look raised towards his. Restlessly he wandered about the garden, watching every changing light, listening to every sound. He saw when from the dining-room the company retired to the drawing-room above: later he heard her voice blending in song with that of Rashleigh Rashleigh. He listened with bitter and jealous feelings. He thought her again drinking deep the cup of her former worldliness, and he knew not that for her that cup, once so sweet, was now turned to bitterness and gall; to dregs of calumny, insult, and shame.

CHAPTER VI.



A STORM had broken over the head of Grace Lee. It had come to her like a dark cloud on a summer's day. She sat alone and happy by the open window, breathing the pure mountain air that gathered sweetness and fragrance as it passed over her pleasant garden. Stars glittered in the azure heavens; and all on earth beneath seemed happiness and peace.

Phœbe entered the room bringing in the lamp and a letter; Grace recognised the writing of Gerald. "A quiet and friendly epistle, as usual," she thought, breaking the seal. The Epistle was as follows:—

"MY DEAR MISS LEE,—With much pain I

heard of your severe illness.” And how does he know I have been ill, thought Grace ; perhaps the rest will show. She resumed : “ I trust you are now fully recovered. I fear, however, the climate of Wales does not agree with you, and Lily says your health is best in Italy. I need not add, that wherever you may choose to direct your wanderings I shall be most happy to accompany you. A convent will, of course, be the most suitable ; indeed the only proper place of residence. And now, my dear friend, allow me to avail myself of the privileges the word implies, to allude, believe me I do so with the greatest reluctance, to a most painful subject. You have trusted, and you have been deceived,—betrayed the world says,—but surely I need not tell you how little its judgments should be regarded. Let me, however, intreat you, for the sake of your fair name, to act with prudence ; or if, as I fear, your generous temper scorns prudence, let me appeal to pride. Remember that he who knew

not how to appreciate a noble woman, cannot be worthy her resentment. You are as much above him in nature and gifts, as you were once in position and fortune. Would you had remembered this, and never condescended to bestow on so worthless an object this great and undeserved honour. But I must not say more on so delicate a subject. Too much, I fear, I have already said. Yet at the risk of offending you, I must again urge the absolute necessity of leaving England for a while; in absence, you will find the best—the only cure. Thus you may recover the peace you have lost; thus the world will forget its slanders and its calumnies. By the time you return, public opinion will, I trust, have done you ample justice; but even should this desirable result never be attained, should the world, where you have reigned so long, persist in wronging to the end, what it once so justly extolled and admired, believe, my dear friend, that there is one whose opinion of you cannot change, on whose

reading a letter from Gerald Lee; and this time, more than the first, she thinks she is dreaming—well she may, for it tells a tale of disgrace and shame, a story of which she is heroine, and that has gone forth to the world with her name on the title-page.

Miss Lee had been wealthy, courted and admired beyond the lot of most women. For sins so deep, it was but just she should pay penalty. She was rich, an insult to the needy; flattered, a more bitter insult to the neglected. She was admired, and there were thousands whom the world would not admire. She was learned, too—a great piece of presumption—witty, and everyone knows that wit is wickedness. And then she had done the most extraordinary and contradictory things; she had spoken to people without previous introduction; she had not spoken to hundreds to whom she had been introduced; she had not asked everyone to her parties; she had not accepted every invitation;

she had worn a very eastern-looking dress ; she had not worn gloves. Say not in these things there is nothing to mention or remember : from such miserable materials spring the most bitter, the most unrelenting hatreds, precisely because the cause is so unworthy and so mean that it never can be confessed.

Miss Lee was too noble-minded to suspect this ; but perhaps she mistrusted Fortune. Poly-crates only cast away a gem of great price, Grace relinquished all she held from the capricious goddess. The manner in which she made her exit from the great world crowned the long list of her offences. The women thought it extremely "impertinent." "Just like her, you know, dear." The men, to borrow Rashleigh's elegant phraseology, pronounced it "deucedly theatrical." All were ripe to hear, listen to, and quickly receive any tale of slander. Yet, spite some peculiarities and whims, so pure, blameless, and modest had been the life of Grace

Lee, that envy for a time reluctantly held her peace. Oblivion was fast sheltering her in its protecting obscurity, when suddenly a vague murmur rose from some unknown quarter, then swelled into a loud clamour and universal denunciation. What Miss Lee had done, no one said positively, for the very good reason that no one knew ; but everyone agreed that it was something very shocking. Horrified mammas loudly protested that she and their angelic girls had never been in contact. Gentlemen smoothed their moustache, and smiled, and coughed, and hinted that even a magnificent fortune could not reconcile a man to some things. And dowagers shook their heads mysteriously, and only here and there some gallant old bachelor raised in favour of the absent one a solitary but unavailing protest.

At length the slander took body, form, and name. The names of Grace Lee and John Owen were brought in strange conjuncture. In the corner of an insignificant Welsh paper there

appeared some anonymous lines headed "Timon and Lady Grace." From the title the matter may be judged. Scarcely could the author of this obscure attack have contemplated its result. The casting of the first stone was the signal for lapidating the victim. No sooner was a voice raised against Grace, than, echoed on every side, it became an angry cry. No sooner was her name in print, than new libels sprung up like mushrooms. The Parliamentary season was unusually dull; the debates were unusually long and prosy. The publishing world was languid; either there were no great geniuses then, or they were all asleep. Anything in the way of food was acceptable to a fasting public. The story of Grace, with numerous additions, went the whole round of the newspapers. A song was composed on the subject; a play was got up and acted; an American writer, who had been one of Miss Lee's guests, inserted the tale in the second edition of his

European Notes. A Frenchman made on the subject a *feuilleton*, entitled "*Les Caprices d'une Grande Dame*."

Everyone knew that Miss Lee had conceived a violent passion for Mr. Owen: everyone knew that Miss Lee had given up her magnificent fortune for Mr. Owen's sake; everyone knew that Miss Lee had followed Mr. Owen to Wales. Here the story underwent some variations: according to one account, Timon had to the end remained hard hearted; according to another, he had relaxed from this unnatural severity, always prudently keeping short of marriage. But the most popular of all versions was, that Miss Lee had embraced some modern principles on the subject of wedlock; that she was too independent to submit to its restrictions; and that anything resembling breach of promise was the last and least of Timon's sins. But however the successive editions of a tale may vary, the end remains unchanged. To

these different accounts there was but one conclusion, Timon had tired of the lady ; she had fallen ill with grief ; her heart was broken.

Again and again Grace read Gerald Lee's letter ; and as its meaning became more plain and clear, the sting penetrated more deeply. She was thought slighted and betrayed ; her supposed misfortunes and wrongs were the theme of public comment ; she whom all had once envied,—she was now pitied. But this was not all : principles she never had been able to understand were attributed to her ; she was said and believed to have carried them out to their fullest extent. She, once the idol of opinion, was branded with that sin which has been made woman's deepest shame, because it is most foreign to a woman's nature ; because against it her modesty, her pride, her heart, not less than her conscience, protest and revolt ; because it is the mortal foe of the pure and

sacred feeling she has guarded for ages: holy love! that dies the moment unholy sin is born.

The blush of injured modesty and wounded pride rose to Grace Lee's brow as she put away Mr. Lee's letter. In it he again urged absence; but her temper was bold and fearless: flight she disdained; she resolved to stay, to crush the hydra, Slander, and compel the world to confess her injured innocence.

Rashleigh Rashleigh and his mother were spending a fortnight in Rashleigh House; Mrs. Lloyd, Miss Lloyd, Miss Anna Lloyd, and Miss Mary Anna Lloyd were tasting the sweets of a Welsh spring; Lady Emma Meredith was honouring with her aristocratic presence the dwelling of Mr. and Mrs. Wood. Besides those persons, others whom Miss Lee had formerly known, who had formerly been her guests, tasted her hospitality and basked in the sunshine of her fortunes, in all, twelve or

fourteen individuals, were now in Wales, dispersed within a few miles of her dwelling.

On the same day every one received a courteous invitation to dine with Miss Lee. They were all surprised at her presumption; yet such is the power of habit that they accepted. Grace knew she had done a bold, perhaps a rash thing; but her courage failed not.

The day came. Owen had bidden her farewell. She sat dressed and alone in the drawing-room. At length the servant threw the door open, and Rashleigh Rashleigh entered.

"You are alone," said Grace, looking in vain for Mrs. Rashleigh's portly figure.

Rashleigh Rashleigh never lost the opportunity of making a speech.

"A most unfortunate, I will add a most unforeseen accident, has prevented Mrs. Rashleigh from accompanying me. As my dear mother was stepping into her carriage she sprained her ankle. She sends her kindest regards."

"I am sorry—" began Grace. The entrance of Mr. Wood interrupted her. Mrs. Wood was not with him. Grace received him courteously, but did not allude to his wife's absence. He gave the uncalled-for explanation.

"The baby was so ill last night, that poor Mrs. Wood has, to her great regret, been obliged to remain behind. I assure you she was concerned—"

"For the baby," said Grace; "truly, Mr. Wood, so am I. Is it cutting its teeth?"

"Precisely its teeth," observed Mr. Wood, who was not practised in the art of polite untruths. "And then poor Rosa is laid up with a head-ache, a bad, nervous head-ache."

"What a delicate organisation is that of Miss Wood," put in Rashleigh Rashleigh; "one of those feminine, sensitive natures that are, to the grosser nature of man, a riddle and a mystery."

"Miss Wood used to be more free from head-ache formerly," quietly observed Grace.

Mr. Wood coughed and looked uncomfortable. The time had been when Rosa had risen from the bed of sickness to accept one of Miss Lee's invitations; not for the sake of the pleasure, but for that dearer to vanity and pride, the distinction.

"As to poor Lady Emma," resumed Mr. Wood, gathering courage as he got to the end of his ungracious embassy; "she is in that miserably nervous state, that she feels quite unequal to company."

"Ah!" said Grace, coldly. "Mr. Rashleigh," she added, turning towards him, "help me to thank Mr. Wood for his great kindness in leaving his distressed household for my poor company."

"Every good deed," began Rashleigh Rashleigh, bowing in obedience to her commands—

"Brings its own reward," she continued. "I trust Mr. Wood may find it so this evening."

Mr. Wood did not like his position; it was decidedly unpleasant. The entrance of the

two Radforths, brothers, and single young men, enlivened him a little, and changed the conversation.

The Radforths were young, and youth is never very severe. They certainly did think that Miss Lee had been imprudent and unfortunate, but a woman may be both and yet be very charming; and if Miss Lee had sunk in their esteem, she had not in their good graces. They were markedly civil and attentive; too much so, Grace felt. A while she bore with that sort of flattery, of which, when they do not respect much, men are liberal to all women; but perceiving the dawn of a smile on Mr. Rashleigh's face, she quietly settled the matter, by observing to Mr. Wood.

“And how goes Etruria?”

The Etruscan antiquities were Mr. Wood's hobby. At once he plunged deep into sepulchres and lost cities, and Grace followed him; she was learned and critical. She slipped in a few words

of Latin, and ventured on a Greek quotation. The Radforths were horrified. They were not learned themselves, and thought learned ladies a bore; half a dozen adventures would not have injured a woman so much in their opinion as Greek. As soon would they have thought of making love to Minerva as of addressing another soft speech to Miss Lee. When she politely tried to make them enter into the conversation, Walter Radforth sulkily replied, "he knew nothing of Etruscan antiquities," and George impatiently looked at the clock, as much as to say "Are we ever going to have that dinner?"

"I fear," said Grace, "that our other friends have forgotten us."

But even as she spoke the door opened, and Mr. Randolph entered.

"He, too, comes alone," thought Grace, with a pang; but she smiled a gracious welcome.

"The baby," began Mr. Randolph,

"Is cutting its teeth," suggested Mr. Wood, laughing boisterously at his own witticism.

Mr. Randolph looked cool and gentlemanly, and resumed:

"Has been taken so poorly that Mrs. Randolph, with the deepest regret, was compelled to remain behind."

"Every one knows that Mrs. Randolph is a devoted mother," said Rashleigh Rashleigh, in his plausible reading voice.

Mr. Randolph laid his hand on his heart and bowed. Grace said,

"I know not how to thank Mr. Randolph for having left Mrs. Randolph in so trying a moment."

"It was Mrs. Randolph's own wish," courteously replied Mr. Randolph. "I wished to stay with Mrs. Randolph. Mrs. Randolph would not allow it."

"I am grateful to Mrs. Randolph," said Grace, with the air of a queen.

Here Phœbe, opening a side door, looked significantly at her mistress. With an apologetic motion to her guests Grace rose and went up to her. Phœbe handed her a note; Miss Lee hastily tore it open and read :

“Mrs. Lloyd, Miss Lloyd, Miss Anna Lloyd, and Miss Mary Anna Lloyd present their compliments to Miss Lee. They deeply regret not being able to avail themselves of Miss Lee’s kind and courteous invitation. This morning has brought them the melancholy news of Miss Lloyd’s sudden death. In their present affliction they could but mar the enjoyment of Miss Lee’s social circle.”

Thus, of the nine ladies whom Grace had invited, who had accepted the invitation, not one had come. She had sunk so low that her own sex forsook her. The insult was concerted, and she felt it, as it was meant that she should feel it, to her very heart. But that heart was brave, and proud.

“False world !” she thought ; “I have scorned thee when thou wert at my feet, and thou shalt not conquer me now.”

She turned back to her guests and looking round that narrow circle where she knew but too well that she had not one friend, she said in a clear, steady voice, “Gentlemen.” There was a general pause of attention. She resumed : “A country manager once undertook to give Romeo and Juliet before a country audience ; but when the hour for the performance came on, he had to make his appearance with an apology : Romeo had taken cold under the balcony of Juliet ; Mercutio was in prison for debt ; Tybalt had absconded for reasons best known to himself. The Capulet and the Montague had been carousing together : they could not act. In short in his own proper person the poor manager had to be Romeo, Mercutio, Tybalt, Capulet, and Montague. In such a predicament I now find myself. Mrs. Rashleigh

has sprained her ankle; Mrs. Wood's baby is cutting its teeth; Mrs. Randolph's is poorly; Lady Emma Meredith does not feel equal to company; Mrs. Lloyd, Miss Lloyd, Miss Anna Lloyd, and Miss Mary Anna Lloyd have lost Miss Lloyd their ninth cousin, and are in the deepest affliction. You see, gentlemen, all that had been provided for you; the experience of mature years; matronly ease and grace; the liveliness of youth—but a series of calamities deprives you of the pleasure and robs me of the honour: *bongré malgré*, your poor hostess must be to-night the only lady of the company."

Of course everyone had something civil and courteous to say: Grace heard them all with a proud smile, then accepting Mr. Rashleigh's arm she ushered them down to the dinner—there was nothing more to delay. Never in her most flattered days had she been more self-possessed. She smiled, she was gracious, she played the part of a pleased and courteous

hostess with perfect ease and matchless grace. If impertinence, if careless levity had entered the minds of her guests, her self-possession and dignity sufficed to keep them in check. Fallen Queen though she was, she had preserved that habit of submission and homage, that manner of negligent superiority which are the inevitable result of years of power and command. She could in her absence be slandered, but in her presence cowed insolence slunk off like the slave vainly sent against Roman Marius.

But the evening was not over. Mr. Owen in the garden below had worked himself into a passion of jealousy and wrath. He felt convinced that Grace had seen through his love, that she had made a secret jest of it. That she scorned him and was going to marry another—Rashleigh most likely. Under his cynical, worldly mien, Timon concealed strong passions, which he had never taken much trouble to control. Love, anger, jealousy, now

overpowered his better judgment. Little knowing what he was doing, he appeared before the astonished servants and asked to speak to Miss Lee. The guests and their hostess were again in the drawing-room. Glad of anything that could wear away the bitter hours, Grace had consented to sing a duet with Mr. Rashleigh. Whilst they were thus engaged, the door opened and a servant announced Mr. Owen. Rashleigh saw him and half smiled; Grace saw and heard nothing, until rising from the music-stool she found herself face to face with John Owen. She thought him miles away and there he stood before her, looking down at her with a severe and ironical glance. She smiled and held forth her hand; he did not seem to see it, but said briefly:

“I had nearly reached W——, when I perceived that Scamp had followed me. Not being able to get rid of him, I came back.”

Her dog forsaking her for a stranger! Grace

saw Mr. Rashleigh bite his lip, and the Radforths exchange significant glances. Ay, this was the finishing stroke; but all she said was, "Scamp shall be chained up. I am so much obliged to you."

Mr. Owen bowed coldly and went up to Mr. Wood, whom he knew, and with whom he remained in conversation for the rest of the evening. A little past eleven, Miss Lee's guests began to disperse. The Radforths and Mr. Randolph went one way; Mr. Wood and Mr. Rashleigh another. Instead of joining either party, Mr. Owen coolly remained behind. In vain, as the door closed on Rashleigh Rashleigh, Miss Lee looked with cold displeasure at the lingering visitor. He scarcely seemed to understand her, and said:

"I want to speak to you."

"To-morrow," replied Grace.

"Now," he insisted.

"To-morrow," she said again.

Hurt to the quick, he turned away, then suddenly he turned back. His eyes overflowed with passion and reproach ; his brow was flushed with pain. What did he say to her? What does a man say to the woman he loves when her indifference stings him beyond self-control and pride? Anything, everything that can relieve from present torment. Lovers do not always now, as in the days of old, bend the knee to their mistress and their lady ; but the proudest of them all can still lay his pride at a woman's feet. Man, who justly or wrongly has taken from woman the wide world of ambition, toil, and fame, cannot take away from her a few hours' sovereignty over his own heart. There she holds absolute, though fleeting sway, an idol worshipped or betrayed, but all-powerful whilst her empire lasts.

Nature had made Mr. Owen eloquent, and passion made him doubly so. With all the vehemence of feelings suddenly released from

bondage, with all the ardour of hopes whose desires centered in her, he stood before Grace pleading with the mingled humility and imperiousness of a violent passion.

"You," she said, at length, pressing her hands to her bosom as if to repress some inward strife and tumult there—"you, Mr. Owen; do you mean to say that you love me?"

"Ay," he replied. "Since I thought you dying, you have been to me the very dearest thing of this earth."

Unconscious passion trembled in his voice and melted in his look. She averted her face from his ardent gaze. Almost imperiously he asked for a reply. She gave it at once.

"I never shall be your wife."

A moment he remained transfixed; then he said:

"Say it again."

She said it. He looked at her with mingled wrath and grief, and left her without another word.

For* an hour and more Grace remained as Mr. Owen had left her, absorbed in thought. At length Phoebe entered and disturbed her mistress. Grace sat by a table with her brow on her hand. She looked up slowly.

"Is Mr. Crankey come in?" she asked. For James, who had become strangely wilful and moody of late, had gone out early that morning and had not returned the whole day.

"No, ma'am, Mr. Crankey is not come in. And Mr. Crankey, ma'am, has sent this by a poor woman."

She handed her a folded and sealed slip of paper. Grace opened it and read.

"I know all and it maddens me. Farewell! You never more shall see, never more hear of James Crankey."

"He too!" thought Grace; and perhaps that the youth whom she had taught, protected and cherished, whose boyish passion had seemed so devoted and so fond, should join in the world's

condemnation, was not the least bitter pang she had to bear.

Love is quick. Phœbe knew nothing, but she guessed much. Anxiously she looked at her mistress's face; but there was something there beyond Phœbe's knowledge : a meaning sweet and serene ; a look proud and triumphant.

CHAPTER VII.

“THIS cannot last,” thought Owen. “I cannot be the slave of one thought and one feeling—this must cease.”

He forgot that for every day of the last three weeks he had come to precisely the same conclusion. As well may the sick man say: “I must be cured; this troublesome fever must leave me;” as he who has become subject to some tyrant passion revolt against his fate. The soul, like the body, has her diseases; illnesses that spring from over indulgence, rashness, pride, and for which the Divine hand alone can find a remedy and a cure.

Most unavailing therefore was Mr. Owen’s

revolt. He could not help loving Grace, and loving her, he could not help lingering near the spot where she dwelt. With wounded pride and crushed hopes he had gone back to his own home, and since then he had never gathered sufficient resolve to leave Wales. To stay was useless, he knew it ; he derided his own folly, yet he could not help it, and as his mind was one of analysis, a mind that ever sought in its workings, in its own story the mysterious laws of humanity, from the consideration of his own feelings, he had emerged into a broad ocean of speculation, when these philosophic reflections were suddenly disturbed.

He lay reclining on a grassy bank in the narrow dell of the Ap Rhydon. On one side the high rocks were black with deep shade ; on the other they were yellow and sunlit from their summit to their base. Above spread the blue sky, below foamed the green torrent. It was the spot where two years before he had

seen Grace, where on an eventful night he had delivered her from danger and death. But now the cliffs had lost their snows, and many a fern of soft green grew in their crannies ; now the torrent no longer rushed down in wrath, but rolled carelessly along its rocky bed.

This spot had ever been a haunted one for John Owen. In youth he had brought to it the ambitious hopes of manhood ; in manhood he brought to it the passionate dreams of youth. Such places there are in every human story : a void to all save one : to that one crowded with the visions of years. Every heart has, or has had its Egeria, its spirit of hope, or prayer, or love that spoke to it in solitude.

But in this spot, Mr. Owen, as we have said, was now interrupted and disturbed. Emerging from behind a rock, Doctor Crankey had suddenly appeared, and walking up to him he said as suddenly :

“I was seeking you, sir.”

“Well, here I am,” replied Owen, neither rising nor changing his attitude. For he was in one of the moods when man can scarcely brook the speech or presence of man.

“I should like to know, sir,” continued Doctor Crankey, sitting down and looking at him fixedly. “I should like to know, I say, how and why it is that, spite of what passed between us when we last met, I find no advance made towards that object.”

“Miss Lee will not have me,” carelessly replied Owen.

Doctor Crankey looked surprised, and for a moment thoughtful ; then he said in a peculiar tone :

“Are you sure you asked her in a proper way? Women are particular about these things.”

“True,” ironically replied Owen. “I dare say it was the manner of the asking Miss Lee objected to.”

“Sir, sir,” warmly exclaimed the priest, “it is not because your name has been mixed up

with hers that I will admit your right to speak so."

"My name mixed up with hers," said Owen, slowly raising himself up on one elbow; "how so!" and he fixed on the priest a surprised and piercing look.

Doctor Crankey shook his gray head; his eyes glistened, his lips trembled.

"Ask the false world," he replied; "ask the slanderer who first invented, ask the traitors and the cowards who took up the tale."

He rose angry and excited from the rock on which he had been sitting, and walked up and down. Owen rose, too; he waited till the old man was more calm to question him again. Doctor Crankey answered him fully; he told him all without softening one point; to conclude, he placed in his hands the "W—— Chronicle," in which had appeared the first attack against Grace. The stanzas were numerous; the poetry was bad; the meaning was scurrilous and low;

it was a slander of the grossest kind—a cowardly slander, too—for there was nothing not on the safe side of law and libel in the story of Timon and Lady Grace. Mr. Owen heard and read, but said not one word. Without heeding his silence Doctor Crankey continued :

“ I never knew the truth until three days ago. I could ill spare the time, yet I came at once. I found her calm and gay, but I do not trust her. I am going back to Rome ; I want her to come with me. She will not ; yet she might mind you if you advised it ; shall I say it is your opinion that she ought to go ; that her health requires it.”

“ I must see her first,” quietly replied Owen.

“ And when ? ”

“ Why not now ? ”

“ Surely the sooner the better.”

They proceeded at once to Miss Lee’s dwelling. They found her working at her embroidery frame, to all appearance very calm. On seeing

Mr. Owen she reddened slightly, but only for a moment. Doctor Crankey half groaned, and throwing himself into an easy chair, he said in the most dismal and melancholy tone :

“ Grace, Mr. Owen is come ;” here his voice faltered, and he added, in an altered key, “ he will tell you himself why he is come.”

She looked up, half surprised, at Mr. Owen. He sat down by her, and looking at her with mingled fondness and sorrow, he said :

“ And do you really wish to leave this country, do you really choose a voluntary exile ? ”

An ardent flush rose to Grace Lee’s face and brow.

“ I have no such intention,” she quickly replied.

“ Then what will you do ? ” sharply asked Doctor Crankey.

“ Stay.”

“ Stay and fret.”

“ No, stay and endure.”

“ And is there nothing for you between exile

and tame endurance?" resumed Owen, in a low and ardent tone. "Ah! if you would—if you but would give me a right to protect and defend you—how soon their serpent tongues should be silent."

"Humph!" sceptically growled Doctor Crankey. Owen turned sharply on him; his eyes lit with a man's dignity and pride; his smile was haughty and secure, as he said: "And do you think, sir, that any one would dare to assail my wife's fair name, or that if any one were so bold, I could not find the remedy?"

"Well, I dare say you would," honestly replied Doctor Crankey, "and indeed," he added, with a sigh, "you will do well, Grace, to accept Mr. Owen's offer. He has honour, and if I say so I may be trusted, for I never liked him much, as he knows, and as I say to his face, for I scorn a lie as I scorn the devil. He will be too, what I alas cannot be to you, a protector. I am a priest, a man of peace; I cannot be suspected of giving bad advice. He knows, and will, I trust, re-

member the precept that forbids man to shed the blood of an erring brother. Anything like violence I must in the most earnest manner deprecate. Yet there is no denying that if the editor of the 'W—— Chronicle' were to get a good horsewhipping—but heaven forbid I should be understood as suggesting any such unchristian proceeding; yet, as I said, if by any chance—”

Grace interrupted him. She fixed on Owen a glance of calm pride, and leaning back in her chair, she said quietly :

“And what can you do for me, Mr. Owen?”

“I can right and avenge you.”

“Can you silence slander?”

“Ay, and crush it.”

“And do you know all—all that is said of me?”

“I think I do.”

“Do you know,” she continued, with a heightened colour, “that Grace Lee has been, and is daily, outraged in all that a woman holds dear and sacred: her honour and her privacy.”

“ Yes, I know all that.”

“ Yet you persist ; then it is from honour, from duty—because, though unwillingly, you are in some sort the cause, or rather the pretence.

Thank you, Mr. Owen, but I need not so great a sacrifice.”

“ Honour and duty ! You wrong me—you know you wrong me.”

His face was flushed with pain ; with the pain of a love which the loved one will not even acknowledge. She should have been blind indeed had she not seen that neither honour nor even generosity were his true motives ; that nothing save a strong passion could thus humble his pride.

“ But what can you do ? ” she asked, looking at him very earnestly.

“ What ! trust in me, and you shall triumph over perfidious foes, and still more perfidious friends. I will lead you in the midst of both. I will work and toil until your foot shall once more

be on their necks—you know this is no idle boast; you know it is not. You know that our marriage alone would give the false world the lie. Can a man be the betrayer of his own wife—can she be deserted who is beloved—can she be said to reject a sacred tie who accepts it in the face of all. Believe me, and though I speak with a selfish hope, believe me, from the day you become my wife slander is powerless, or she must invent some new story; let her if she dare—let her if she dare.”

He laughed with mingled scorn and pride. Grace looked at him with flushed cheeks and parted lips. The world said, “He is sick and weary of her;” and she heard him, ardent and suppliant, entreat her to become his wife. He had not come back to her with pity, with generosity, with sympathy, but with the beseeching passion of a lover. His disdainful indifference to the whole sex had once been notorious; the beautiful Mrs. Chesterfield herself had, with the

kind intention of amusing herself at his expense, attempted the impossible conquest of his flinty heart; and where she had failed, Grace, without beauty, unconsciously succeeded. She was proud, and had been deeply wounded in her pride. He offered her all that could tempt a proud woman: justification in the broad daylight, and a noble vengeance; and, what she was woman enough to feel, the sweetness of a last triumph. Again she looked at him, then held out her hand. In a transport of joy he raised it to his lips.

“There’s a good sensible girl,” said Doctor Crankey, approvingly.

Grace did not hear him. Her eyes were still fastened on John Owen’s face flushed with triumph. With a smile she withdrew her hand.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, “you have misunderstood me—I told you so once before—I never can be your wife.”

He remained thunderstruck. Doctor Crankey opened his eyes rather widely.

"Then you come to Rome with me," he said impatiently.

To Rome, where she had been so courted—so flattered. Grace smiled at the thought of going there now.

"I shall stay in Wales," she said, leaning her cheek on her hand, "in Wales, between the mountains and the sea. I am well here, Doctor Crankey," and she quietly resumed her work.

Doctor Crankey frowned and shook his head with a discontented mien. Then he rose, and coughing significantly to John Owen, he beckoned him to the door. There, looking him full in the face, he said deliberately, "John, I know she likes you." With which oracular sentence he turned away and left him.

From the threshold of the door Mr. Owen looked at her. She had not heard Doctor Crankey's last words, nor did she seem to feel her lover's gaze. She sat in the window working, pride and serenity were written in her face.

Suddenly she looked up: he was sitting by her side: he was speaking; passionately he entreated her not to be so indifferent, so cold.

"I am not cold," said Grace; "I am not indifferent, Mr. Owen. I like—I esteem you; I admire you too, and you know it; you have the very turn of mind and temper that most attracts me, because it is that most removed from little things—"

"But you do not love me," he interrupted, impatiently.

"Yes I do—why not?"

He looked eagerly in her face.

"Why not?" she said again.

"Ah! Grace, Grace," broke from him, "that is not love!"

"I suppose you mean it is too freely confessed—well let it be—what matters about all this? Mr. Owen, you know what I have twice told you: I never can be your wife."

And leaning back in her chair, she half smiled

in his face. In hers there was something he could not define; a gladness blending with sorrow he had never seen there before. Again he entreated, argued; again he failed; but still it was with a smile that she denied him. He took her two hands in his; he looked in her face; in words of fond and burning reproach he vowed to waken her from this coldness, and that as he loved her, so she should one day love him. She had heard him with downcast eyes: suddenly he felt her tremble; she looked up at him with uneasiness that was not fear, with reluctance that was not dislike; and, stung to the very heart, he abruptly rose up and left her.

For hours he wandered far, vainly seeking peace. "Oh, wise and just," he bitterly thought; "wise was the precept, if it could but be obeyed, that forbade the adoration of one being by another. This worship is not more than the human heart can give, but it

is more than a human heart can bear. The burden is too mighty. Did I not see to-day that I wearied her. She knew not what to do with so much love. And that is why she will not be my wife; and that is why, even if she had consented, I should not know which would be the greatest misery; to give her up or to have her; to release her on the eve of clasping her to my heart for ever, or to keep her there wretched and reluctant. I know that years would not appease the passion of to-day; that no more in this than in other things should the golden peace, the sweet weariness of other men, be mine; and yet what a strange torment it would be to inflict pain on the loved one; to feel that the delight of one was the curse of the other; to possess not a wife, but a woman; not a mistress, but a slave." For days he went not near her. It was not that her repulses humbled his pride: it was that he could not bear her indifference. But at length even

the thought of this grew weak compared with the bitterness of absence. One evening towards sunset the void of separation conquered his proud heart, and his steps instinctively turned towards the dwelling his thoughts never left.

He found her in the garden, leaning on the low wall that overlooked the broad blue sea. Beyond it, in purple clouds, set the glorious sun, lighting it with a track of gold; the lines of the winding shore were half veiled in a violet haze; below, on the sandy beach, softly broke with a light foam and a low dash, the murmuring waves. She heard his step, and without looking round she said :

“I am glad you are come, Mr. Owen. Did you ever see such a glorious sunset !” He gave the whole scene a rapid and careless glance, then leaning on the low ivy-covered wall, he looked at her. Her face was flushed, but whether with some inward emotion, or because on it shone the light of the dying day,

he knew not. Suddenly turning towards him, she said :

“ My friend, I have news for you. God is good, and whom He loveth He chastiseth. Gerald Lee is a bankrupt ; in his great wreck my little fortune has perished ; of all I held mine this morning, nothing this evening is left. God sent me Disgrace, and I barred my door against her ; I said that my guest and friend this woman clad in the robe of shame should never be. Now He has sent her sister, Poverty ; and now one calamity has taught me to bear the other. Now, I say to these two stern sisters, welcome ; thrice welcome ye messengers of God’s mercy to a sinner.”

She smiled in his face, gay and serene. At first he was confounded ; but he quickly rallied. His eyes sparkled, and stepping towards her he said :

“ Be my wife, and come to London with me.”

Grace seemed startled, but she soon recovered, and asked gaily,

"And what have you to do with such a burden?"

"A burden—a burden!" he echoed, bitterly. "Oh! how plainly you make me feel and see your indifference."

Grace looked at him fixedly, and reddened very much. He resumed:

"But you will not, I suppose, deny me the right to inquire into the fate of that burden from which you so kindly wish to exempt me—what is to become of you?"

She did not answer.

"Oh! I see—I know"—he cried, half angrily. "Doctor Crankey was right after all; you have gone back to the old scheme, to the old story—a Sister of Mercy—do not think I shall suffer or allow it."

Grace seemed more surprised at the idea than offended at his imperious tone. "I have no such thought," she said gravely; "do you think I would give to Heaven what the world has rejected

—what I consider a burden to man: a stained name, a penniless, disgraced woman. A Sister of Mercy. No, Mr. Owen, to be one I am not called. My destiny is to bear whatsoever the hand of God may send; to place my will in His will; to forget yesterday; to think not of the morrow—ay, to make of daily life a perpetual, a faithful ‘Thy will be done.’ ”

“But what will you do?” he asked desperately.

“How can I tell? People never do what they intend doing, but what circumstances permit. I have begun by sending away the servants, for to-morrow, I suppose, I may expect strange visitors. Doctor Crankey, thank heaven, is gone. But you mean what shall I do? Work, I suppose. Well, why look so dismayed? Is not work the destiny of thousands, of millions?—let it be mine.”

“Work—and what do you know of toil?—what do you know of poverty, save its name?”

“True; but her dark face daunts me not. I

tell you I fear not a poor home, poor cheer, homely garments, nor the world's coldness."

"But I fear, I dread them all for you. I dread as death the mere thought of seeing you enter, unprotected and alone, a harsh and bitter world. Doctor Crankey is absent, Gerald Lee is ruined—who have you?"

"God Almighty."

"And you will let me be nothing—nothing to you. Oh! Grace,—Miss Lee, hear me. It is not the lover, it is the friend who now addresses you. One you may not care for; the other I believe you like and trust in. I know, and the knowledge has both charmed and tormented me, that as a friend you like me. Yes, I have seen your eye light on me with kindness; I have felt friendliness and warmth in the pressure of your hand. Be my wife; give me the right to offer you a home, and in that home, poor as it is, you shall be sovereign mistress. You like Wales, let us live in

Wales. I once heard you say you liked the house I live in;—let us spend our days in it. I have a garden, to it I will transplant your favourite flowers. I am not without money; at the sale here I will purchase back the things you like and are used to, your favourite chair, your frame, your books. There are rooms up-stairs that look down the valley, they shall be yours wholly. You shall have Phœbe too, Phœbe whom you like and are used to; and unless when and how you wish it, I shall never ask to see you. And now say not that this is romantic generosity; I plead guilty to the selfish hope, that spite your present coldness you will one day end by liking me: that the love which came to me so suddenly, will though slowly also come to you.”

“But what becomes of your journey to London, of your ambition?”

“Perish all, perish ambition: so I have you.” The reply was as impassioned, as it was involuntary.

“But, Mr. Owen,” said Grace, “what if the change of feeling you speak of should never take place? What then would remain to you in exchange for liberty, for years of vain expectation?—Nothing save disappointment and loss.”

“Not all loss;—for should not one roof shelter us from youth to age, from age to death; and one destiny lead us through good and evil fortune to the same grave?”

Grace averted her head and veiled her eyes with her fingers. He thought she was weeping; when suddenly she withdrew her hand, and looked laughing in his face.

“Well!” he said.

“Well!” she replied, and her colour rose and her eyes lit; “you love me with a great love, Mr. Owen, and I am proud of it;—yes, very proud of it, Mr. Owen; and now turn your head away.”

He obeyed slowly; he still stood leaning

with his elbow on the low wall. She swiftly passed behind him, stooped, touched his cheek with her lips, then vanished like a vision.

In vain he started, and turned round trembling with feelings deeper than joy. She was gone. He called her back, he followed her uselessly; neither in the house nor in the garden could he find Miss Lee. He saw and understood that she would not meet him; reluctantly he submitted and left the house.

How long seemed that night! How slow, oh! sun, how slow and lingering seemed to his eyes and heart your rise in the morning! At length, full of hope, full of ardour and impatience, he bent his steps towards her dwelling. But as he approached her home, hope fled. The house was alive with strange and unusual sounds; the guests of whom Grace had spoken, had come to desecrate with their presence her pure and quiet home.

He rang; a bailiff answered him. He asked for Miss Lee.

“Don’t know where the lady is; she left last night I believe. We came this morning.”

She was gone; none knew, none could tell him where. Like a vision of the night she had vanished; like a dream of the dark hours vainly sought for in the morning.

When Mr. Owen returned to his home, he found Scamp lying by the hearth. “How came that dog here?” he asked quickly.

Mrs. Skelton looked up from her work, and replied calmly, “Miss Lee sent him, sir.”

Mr. Owen stooped and patted the Newfoundland’s rough head; and Scamp, looking up, fondly licked his new master’s hand.

CHAPTER VIII.



MONTHS had gone by, and with his cheek on his hand, and his elbow on his knee, and Scamp sleeping at his feet, John Owen sat by a London hearth.

His old life had begun anew ; his life of care and toil. Yet fortune treated him more kindly the second time than the first. He got a few briefs ; he pleaded a few worthless causes ; he actually earned his bread by his profession. But this sort of success was more galling to pride than utter failure. He had done nothing to distinguish himself ; nothing to efface past disgrace ; nothing to vindicate the ambition and the haughty scorn of Timon. Yet never in

his youngest and most ardent years, had he felt within himself so eager a thirst of success, of triumph, and of fame.

With these feelings blended others, as ardent and as keen. Immediately on his arrival in London he had tried to procure tidings of Grace, for to London he had ascertained that she had gone. But in the vast city he had lost all trace of her whom he sought. Yet he had heard and read strange and tragic news. Gerald Lee, unable to bear ruin and disgrace, had committed suicide. What had become of his widow, Mr. Owen could not ascertain, though with her he little doubted to find Grace. After many fruitless researches he at length discovered Doctor Crankey's address in Rome, and to him he wrote a full account of all that had passed, entreating to know something of Grace. Three weeks brought him the following laconic reply. "Grace Lee is in good health, more concerns you not." "We shall see that," thought Owen, tossing the

letter in the fire. He resumed his patient yet eager search. Many a time he thought himself on the eve of success, and suddenly baffled, he found both hopes and labour vain.

He felt disappointed, but not depressed. He was what people call in excellent health and spirits; the eagerness of his search and pursuit chased all sad thoughts away, if indeed a man who never was gay could be called sad. On this evening his mind was more than usually active; it embraced and peopled years with living visions. At length by an effort of will he dismissed these unprofitable thoughts: he gave his whole attention to some professional matter, and was thereby as much absorbed as if such a person as Grace Lee were not in existence. After some time thus spent, he arose to take his accustomed evening walk. Scamp rose to accompany him, but his master forbade it, and with a wistful look, the dog lay down once more.

“Don’t you think it will rain, sir,” suggested Mrs. Skelton, meeting him at the door.

For as she had left her London home to go with him to Wales, so had she now returned to London, charmed, she herself could not have said why, with this saturnine, yet certainly not unkind master.

“Perhaps it will,” he carelessly replied to her remark. He had been reared a mountaineer, and even in the heart of a city he kept a mountaineer’s disregard of weather, foul or fair. And now, spite of the imminent risk of a shower, he went out. He liked to walk thus at night in London; to see thousands moving around him, each the centre of that world of fears and hopes and cares and joys: a man. He liked to watch and read the faces passing before him like images in a dream, and sheltered by the half-gloom of the streets, to follow the current of his own thoughts. Thus he went down the Strand, Fleet Street, and reached

Blackfriars Bridge. A drizzling November night hung above the city ; the dark river reflected dimly the lights of distant bridges, and flowed below their vaulted arches, slow and silent. Discontent, hunger and misery were abroad, and like evil spirits—folly, vice, and sin haunted that night.

Mr. Owen knew London ; he saw much and guessed more. Habit had deadened feelings never very sensitive ; but not the power to observe and draw some pitiless conclusions. As he paced up and down the bridge he thought : “The Ancients had the saturnalia ; they did not think the slave would bear his year’s trial, contumely, and ill-usage without the outlet of a few days’ wild licence. In the same spirit the Southern nations have their carnival. To a whole lifetime’s wretchedness what do we give ? nothing ! True, we preach philanthropy and charity. As if to do good were not the very hardest thing in the world.

Do not all who have attempted it agree that vice and crime cling to their prey more than disease to the sick wretch? Lives, noble talents, energies that could have conquered kingdoms, have been wasted in this useless combat against sin. The tide only grows more strong daily: it will swell until our social world perishes in a convulsion as violent and despairing as ever overtook Pagan Rome. In the meanwhile this world, with its creatures, is the prey of the strongest."

And as Mr. Owen did not feel amongst the weak, he could look on such a state of things with philosophic calmness.

But suddenly a thought smote him in his pride. In this social strife what was to become of Grace; poor, defenceless, and a woman! He could not say, "I will shelter and protect her against a whole world if needed," for he knew not where she was. Insult and calumny had overtaken her, and had he been able to

defend her? And now that he was not even with her, what might she not be enduring? The thought so tormented him that he strove to chase it away, in vain; it returned with a host of images that nearly maddened him; for Mr. Owen, though by no means romantic, had that degree of imagination vivid and powerful that is to its owner scarcely less misery than enjoyment. He called in external images to the aid of will, and looked around him. The hour was late; people were thinning; in one of the recesses he noticed a woman, who sat in an attitude that struck him; her hands were clasped around her knees; her head was sunk on her bosom; once or twice she was accosted by men passing by, but she neither moved nor looked up. A statue could not have been more motionless. He looked, then went on; when he returned she was still there. It began to rain; she did not so much as change her attitude. His attention was in-

voluntarily arrested; he stood a little apart wondering how long she would remain thus. After a while she looked up and rose. A policeman's measured tread was heard on the other side of the bridge. She waited until it lessened and ceased in the distance, then she stepped upon the stone bench where she had sat so long, and bending looked at the river below. It flowed dark and sluggish as Lethe. There might an aching heart hope to find that oblivion and repose which life had failed to give; there might the persecuted sleep in the calm refuge of a watery grave. Such thoughts, perhaps, now crossed the mind of her who looked, for stepping up on the stone parapet and folding her hands on her bosom, she made a sudden spring forward. A strong hand arrested her in the midst of this deed of folly and crime.

"Let me alone!" she said, vainly struggling in the grasp of John Owen; "I'll do it; let me alone, I'll do it."

He knew the voice; he knew too the face, though so pale and wild, which she turned towards him.

“Phœbe!” he said, bending over her. She recognised him, and, hiding her face in her hands, she burst into tears.

“It is raining hard,” coolly said Mr. Owen, “we had better go on.”

He took her arm; she yielded unresistingly; at the end of the bridge he turned into Fleet Street, and said:

“Is this the way?”

“There is no way for me,” she replied, drearily; “pray leave me, Mr. Owen.”

He called a cab. Mechanically she entered it; he followed her in, and bade the cabman drive home. Phœbe burst into hysterical sobs and tears.

“Poor little thing,” he said, kindly; “what could drive you to so desperate a remedy for grief?”

"He wronged me; he knows he did; he and his mother drove me wild; I had no friend."

"Had you not Miss Lee?" asked Owen; his heart beating fast with hope.

"I know nothing of Miss Lee, sir; I have never seen her since I left Wales."

"Well," he said, striving not to betray his disappointment, "I may prove a more efficient friend than Miss Lee. You say you have been wronged; it may be in my power to see you righted; in the meanwhile calm yourself. Whatever may have happened you have a whole lifetime before you, and it is the old, not the young, that need despair."

The cab stopped, and as he helped Phœbe to alight, he saw her half smiling through her tears. But as he led her upstairs, and he told her she was going to see her old friend Mrs. Skelton, Phœbe's heart again failed her.

"What would Mrs. Skelton think?"

"Mrs. Skelton never takes the liberty to think

unless when I permit it," drily replied Mr. Owen.

"Say nothing ; I shall settle that matter."

Little as Mrs. Skelton thought, she certainly showed some astonishment on seeing her master return in such company. Her welcome was stiff and embarrassed.

"I met her," briefly said Mr. Owen ; "and both the weather and the hour compel her to sleep here to-night."

Mrs. Skelton's brow cleared a little ; she became cautiously civil, and spoke of a sofa-bedstead. Satisfied with this, Mr. Owen left them to manage particulars.

The next morning showed him the wisdom of non-interference. He heard Mrs. Skelton talking in the most friendly tones, and Phœbe answering with a laugh. "So much," he thought, "for a woman's grief: despair at night ; laughter and light-heartedness in the morning." He entered the dining-room as he came to this conclusion. Phœbe was laying the cloth for his breakfast.

On seeing him she became mute as a mouse, and with Mrs. Skelton was going to leave the room, when he quietly called her back.

“Stay, Phœbe,” he said, “I want to speak to you.”

Phœbe hung down her head, and reluctantly returned.

Mrs. Skelton said, pointedly, “You want nothing more, sir?”

“Nothing more, thank you.”

She closed the door with an air of injured dignity. Poor Phœbe looked strangely fluttered,—she turned red and pale,—she smoothed the table-cloth,—she made the cup and teapot change places; in short, she betrayed every sign of confusion and shame. Mr. Owen stood leaning against the mantel-piece, looking on with provoking coolness. At length, thinking the right moment come, he said, going straight into the heart of the subject, “What made you so sick of life, Phœbe?”

“Pray don’t, pray don’t, sir,” entreated the poor girl, “pray don’t ask. I don’t want to speak of what’s past, indeed I don’t; and if you ask I shall be sure to reply.”

Mr. Owen half smiled at the compliment Phoebe paid his powers of cross-examination; but he persisted none the less. Disregarding her appeal, he said again, “Well, and why were you tired of life, you foolish little thing?”

Phoebe sat down and began to cry. Mr. Owen was a little softened, and condescended to argue. “He could not understand why Phoebe was so reluctant to speak. Were they not old friends? Was he not nearly double her age? Could she not trust his reserve implicitly?” At length he prevailed, and Phoebe began her reluctant confession.

“When I came to London I went, as Miss Lee had told me, to Mrs. Jones, who was matron of the Female Asylum when I was there. She received me kindly, and took me in. She worked

for a large baby-linen warehouse, and I helped her in the sewing. I might have been very happy there; but Mrs. Jones's son Tom——" here she came to a sudden break.

"And pray what about Tom?" seriously said Mr. Owen.

"Oh, nothing, sir; nothing, indeed," replied Phœbe, with a sigh, "for he went to America; but it brought a little unpleasantness between myself and Mrs. Jones; and when Mrs. Rashleigh asked me to become her maid, I was glad to go to her."

"How did you know Mrs. Rashleigh?"

"Mrs. Jones did work for her, and I took it home; besides I had known Mrs. Rashleigh before. Well, sir, I went to her, and she was very kind; she made quite a favourite of me; she made me dress smart; said she liked a smart maid; and—and she was very kind."

"Well?" said Mr. Owen, looking up.

Phœbe did not reply.

“Was Mr. Rashleigh at home all this time?”

“No, sir, he was in Paris; but Mrs. Rashleigh wrote to him and he came back.”

“And began making love to you, as a matter of course,” ironically suggested Owen.

“He did, indeed, sir,” replied Phœbe, gathering courage, “but seeing his intentions were not honourable, I told him to let me alone. I had never liked him since he spoke to me, as he once did, of Miss Lee; that was in Wales.”

“And pray what did he say?” sharply asked Owen.

“Oh! sir,” said Phœbe, looking ashamed.

“Never mind me, child,” impatiently said Owen; “look on me as an old lady if you like.”

Phœbe stole up a shy look at his sallow face and bluish beard, and thought he would make “a curious old lady;” but she obeyed, and answered: “Well, sir, he caught me in the passage and swore I was a great deal prettier

than my mistress, and he would not let me go, but his mamma came up and said, 'For shame, Rashleigh;' so he was obliged to release me. And, indeed, sir, I am bound to say Mrs. Rashleigh always warned me not to mind her son."

"Of course she did," said Owen, smiling.

"And I did not mind him at first, though I could not stir about the house without having him after me, 'just like a dog,' I told him once. I thought to make him angry, for it was a rude speech from a girl like me to a gentleman like him: but he only laughed, and called me 'his insolent little beauty.' Well, sir, this Mr. Rashleigh would not give me peace. He once met me in the garden, and nearly drove me out of my wits by showing me a pistol and a dagger, and vowing that my cruelty would certainly make him use one or the other. I begged him, if he had any regard for me, to do no such a thing, for that the sight of blood made me turn sick. So he promised not to kill him-

self this time, and as he heard one of the servants coming, he was obliged to let me go. I took care not to get within his reach again, for I was afraid he would kill himself opposite to me, and of all things I can abide none so little as the sight of blood. Well, sir, this Mr. Rashleigh's passion came to that point, that, feeling, as he said, unable to live without me, he offered to make me his lawful wedded wife."

"And of course you accepted."

"I did, sir: for though I did not like him much, he was a fine gentleman, and I had always had a great wish to be a lady. So I said 'Yes,' and he got a license, which he showed me, and we were to have been married to-morrow, when Mrs. Rashleigh, who all along had been so kind, suddenly turned upon me. This morning she missed a ring, a diamond ring; she said all the servants' boxes should be searched. Mine was, and the ring was found in it sure enough, for Mr. Rashleigh had given

it to me two days ago. I said so at once; but when his mother called him in, would you believe, sir, he had the face to deny it; yes, sir, he said I had changed his ring for another, and wanted to make it all out a mistake, and smooth it up, but I told him it was not true, and his mother bade him leave the room; so he thrust his hands into his pockets, shrugged his shoulders, and went off whistling. Ay," indignantly replied Phœbe, "he left me to be scorned and insulted by his mother, opposite all the servants, who hated me for jealousy of Mrs. Rashleigh's past favours. He did, the coward!"

She paused, excited and flushed at the recollection of her faithless lover's baseness.

"Well," said Owen, "is that all?"

"Almost all, sir. Mrs. Rashleigh must have believed her son, for she softened, and said I might sleep in the house, and that she would do something for me. But I told her she need not trouble herself. I packed up my things, and

went off at once to my cousin Ann. I told her the whole story; but she looked cold, and her husband spoke sour. Their unkindness cut me. I went out and wandered away to Blackfriars Bridge. I meant nothing; but when I thought of what had passed, when I remembered that, instead of being Mr. Rashleigh's wife, I was his mother's maid, discarded for theft, ruined in character, disowned by my friends, my heart failed me. I looked over at the water; it tempted me; I wanted to go away; but it seemed as if I could not. So I sat there, and thought and thought, until I got fairly crazy, for I am sure that if I had been in my senses, I never could have dreamed of such a wicked, horrid thing."

She shuddered, and turned pale at the remembrance. Mr. Owen had heard her with much attention. He now said:

"Did Mr. Rashleigh ever write to you?"

"Oh! dear yes, sir, lots of letters. I used

to find them regularly under my room door at night, and very pretty letters they were too."

"What did he say in them?" rather indiscreetly asked Mr. Owen.

"La! sir, how can I tell you that!" replied Phœbe, hanging down her head and blushing.

But Mr. Owen felt no sympathy with her modest distress. He repeated his question.

"Dear me," said Phœbe, "he said all sorts of absurd things; that I was a great deal prettier than a fine lady; that he would make a fine lady of me, if I would only not be a fool; and I know not what else."

"Did he say he would marry you?"

"Not at first. In the last letters he did, but I would not marry him now for the wide world, the mean, pitiful fellow!"

"And where are those letters?" asked Owen, with ill-concealed eagerness.

"All burned, sir."

"You burned them?"

“No, sir, but Mrs. Rashleigh did; as she was examining my box, she caught sight of the packet. On seeing her son’s writing, she turned as red as a Turkeycock, and called me a creature. My blood was up, and I was not going to be creatured by her or any one else. I said so. I said, too, it was a great shame for a lady to demean herself and use such bad words to her own maid, that was soon to be her own daughter-in-law, as she could see by just looking over those letters. Well, sir, you should have seen the rage the old lady flew in when I said this opposite all the servants. She bounced and flounced, and at length worked herself into such a passion, that she flung the letters into the fire. She called me a thing, too, but I did not mind that like a creature, for you know, sir, it is not all the same thing.”

“I know that, with all her rage, Mrs. Rashleigh knew very well what she was about. Well, ’tis no matter; these letters were never intended

to remain in your possession. Indeed, Phœbe, think yourself fortunate in having escaped thus. Mr. Rashleigh did not mean to marry you—you were to have been cheated and deluded in some way or other. Again, I say, think yourself fortunate. But why, when you left Mrs. Jones, did you not apply to Miss Lee?"

"I did not dare."

"Then you knew where she was."

"Yes, sir, for she was kind enough to write to me when she came to London."

"And where was she residing?" asked Owen in words as slow as his heart beat fast.

"Somewhere in the West End; I forget, but it is in the letter."

"Have you it still?"

"Yes, sir, in my box."

"By the way, you had better send for your box, for I do not suppose you wish to return to your cousin's, and Mrs. Skelton will, I am sure, be very glad of your company."

Phoebe faltered thanks; Mr. Owen interrupted. He asked for her cousin's address, wrote it down, and left the room to look for Mrs. Skelton.

That lady was sulking in the kitchen. On hearing her master composedly ask her to procure a messenger for Phoebe's box, she remained amazed, but habitual submission prevailed, and she spoke of a certain Jim who could, she said, be trusted.

"I dare say; yet it will be better for you to take a cab and go with this 'Jim.'"

"The young woman herself, sir," austere-ly began Mrs. Skelton,—

"No," he calmly interrupted, "I want the young woman to stay with me."

Mrs. Skelton was confounded; yet when Mr. Owen took out his watch and begged of her not to delay, she yielded. He returned to the dining-room, where he had left and where he found Phoebe, but her he neither spoke to nor looked at; her story, her wrongs

had vanished from his mind. At length, after months, a clue to Grace Lee was found; he could think of nothing else, and paced the room in a fever of expectation. Nearly an hour he had to wait before Jim made his appearance with the box—for Mrs. Skelton did not condescend to show herself. Phœbe wanted to convey it at once to the room which she shared with the housekeeper; Owen prevented her. "She had better," he said, "look and see that it was all right." Phœbe did not like to take such a liberty; but Mr. Owen impatiently insisted, and not without numerous apologies she obeyed. She opened her box and knelt down on the floor; he took up the "Times," and sat down by the fire. Phœbe was a true woman. Her first thought was for her things; sadly messed and tossed they were. She was sure, she was, that her cousin's fingers had been there; and then she missed a certain lace collar, which threw

her into great perturbation. Little she knew that the saturnine gentleman, who seemed so absorbed in his newspaper, longed to cast into the fire every one of her feminine treasures. At length, when his last drop of patience was failing, Phœbe suddenly said :

“ Ah ! here’s the packet in which I put Miss Lee’s letter. I knew I had not lost it.” Mr. Owen looked up ; Phœbe held a parcel of letters tied with a pink ribbon. She looked at them a little wistfully, then quietly put them back.

“ I think,” said Mr. Owen, “ you had better look at that letter, and ascertain Miss Lee’s address ; she may help you even better than I can.”

Phœbe obeyed. She untied the packet, and began searching for the letter ; as she did so a marked change came over her face. “ Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! ” she exclaimed in great distress, “ I must have put away Mr. Rashleigh’s last letter in the wrong packet. They were

both tied with — with a rose-coloured ribbon, and that deceived me. Oh, dear! oh, dear!” and she looked ready to cry.

“Then where is Miss Lee’s letter?” exclaimed Mr. Owen, keenly disappointed.

“Burned, sir, burned with Tom’s, even to the last beautiful letter he wrote to me just before going to America. It was all that rose-coloured ribbon that did it.”

In his vexation, Mr. Owen felt strongly tempted to hint, that ladies who had more than one packet should certainly have more than one coloured ribbon; but he remembered the sick bed by which the little flirt had once kept such tender watch, and he refrained. All he said was, “And whose letters are these, Phœbe?”

“Mr. Rashleigh’s, sir, all but the last, which I put by mistake at the top of Tom’s packet, and that was what deceived Mrs. Rashleigh. I am sure I wish it were her son’s letters

were burned, or at the bottom of the sea for that matter."

"Oh! so these are Mr. Rashleigh's letters after all!" said Mr. Owen, his eyes lighting. "Well, Phœbe, you will let me look at them, will you not?"

She assented readily; and gathering them up, she put them on the table by him. He quietly sat down to his breakfast, and hinted that he no longer wanted her. Phœbe dropped a curtsy, and went to find Mrs. Skelton in the kitchen.

"I suppose Mr. Owen has done breakfast," pointedly said the housekeeper.

"Oh, no," heedlessly replied Phœbe, "he is only just beginning."

Mr. Owen had good health and a good appetite, and accordingly Mr. Owen's breakfast was not wont to be kept thus long in vain. Mrs. Skelton felt injured and suspicious. She had been put out, she had been made an errand-

boy of, or little better, and for whom forsooth ? She looked at Phœbe, and frowned. Phœbe was very pretty, Mr. Owen was certainly a dear gentleman, but Mrs. Skelton had not reached her years without learning the trite though important truth, "that men were men, and that men they would be until the end of time." What they were to become afterwards Mrs. Skelton did not say even to her own thoughts.

CHAPTER IX.



UNCONSCIOUS of Mrs. Skelton's secret thoughts, Mr. Owen sat reading the letters of Rashleigh to Phœbe Hanwell. At length the perusal over, he laid them down with a smile. From youth this man had been his enemy. As a boy he had insulted him, thwarted and slandered him as a man. He knew too by allusions he alone could understand, by favourite rhymes he alone could remember, that Rashleigh and the author of the first attack on Grace were one. He had never said so to her or to Doctor Crankey, but he had treasured up the knowledge for the reckoning day, and now avenging fate cast his foe at his feet, bound and defenceless.

From these letters he gathered Phœbe's story far more clearly than she could tell it, and he unravelled it in all its windings. Every one knew that Mr. Rashleigh had conceived for a French dancer a passion which had threatened to end in matrimony; was it to avert so great an evil that Mrs. Rashleigh had taken Phœbe for her maid, and, as a letter said, apprized her son of the fact? Perhaps so. However, Mrs. Rashleigh was too decorous a person to permit any impropriety. She had warned Phœbe, and what was of more use, she had probably kept good watch over her; at all events she had interfered at the right moment. It suited her to believe the poor girl guilty, and she had done so; not probably without the wish and intention of finding her innocent, when to do so would be convenient.

"A nice little lady-like plot," thought Mr. Owen, whose knowledge of her character, neither quite good nor quite evil, gave him an intuitive

insight into all her windings. "Pity, though, Mrs. Rashleigh, you threw the wrong packet into the fire." He laughed scornfully. Yet one thing annoyed him ; Rashleigh had committed himself so deeply, had been so madly imprudent, that to crush him was too easy ; any one could do it as well as he, John Owen. Without allowing this sort of evil to dwell much on his mind, he prepared at once for attack. When all was ready, he condescended to speak to Phoebe. He informed her that the only means of redeeming her lost character lay in an action for breach of promise, of which he would undertake the trouble, risk, and expense. Phoebe was rather fluttered, but she consented. This settled, Mr. Owen removed her to a certain retired country place, where he had found her a temporary home. Phoebe, though not much pleased, yielded. Mr. Owen was satisfied ; he had neither the time nor inclination to watch over her, and what between Mr.

Rashleigh's passion, which he concluded to be only temporarily lulled, and Phœbe's incorrigible wish of being a fine lady, he shrewdly guessed he might be left in an awkward predicament. Once she was fairly out of the reach of either deceit or temptation, he opened the attack.

It lies not within our intention to give a minute account of law proceedings in themselves of little interest. Suffice it to say that Mr. Owen did promptly and vigorously what was to be done. The Rashleighs were startled, but neither daunted nor inactive; they repelled the accusation with aristocratic scorn, and retained for their counsel no less a person than the keen and sagacious Mr. Hanley. Yet Owen knew, and he triumphed in the knowledge, that they wanted to compromise the matter with Phœbe. However, she was not to be found, and willing or not, they had to brave and undergo the broad and open light of justice.

The great day came, or rather the eve of the

great day. Mr. Owen had not trusted his natural eloquence; he had prepared a quiet, elaborate speech, in which proof followed proof as link follows link in a chain; a speech that should convince the most incredulous. He had viewed the case under all its aspects, and to every attack prepared a reply. Cased in the triple and invincible armour of truth, right and law, he feared nothing, and felt calm even to weariness. In such moods his thoughts invariably reverted to Grace Lee. Where was she whom he was going to avenge? She whose presence would have given such sweetness to triumph, and whose absence would make it so joyless and so dull? What mattered it to him that Rashleigh had, or had not, promised to marry his mother's maid? Where would be the glory of convicting him? of publicly annihilating him in the face of all? In the reply that came to these questions, Mr. Owen paid the penalty allotted to many an

aspiring temper. The Circe Ambition could make him drink deep of her magic cup, but she could not deceive him. Even whilst, spite of all his pride, he yielded to the spells of the enchantress, he knew that he yielded to a delusion and a dream. He was not sad, for sadness was not in his temper ; but as mist and gloom gather around the highest summits, so over his proudest and most aspiring thoughts there now hung the darkness of a cloud. The vanity of earthly things, of life, of all that the living value, haunted him, as after his usual walk on the bridges he slowly returned to his lodgings, for Mr. Owen had not yet risen to the dignity or expense of chambers. The night was dark, and the staircase was ill-lit. As he ascended, a man passed by him hastily, and went down stumbling. "Is he too so eager to walk towards his own grave?" thought Owen, listening to the sound of his retreating steps, followed by that of the closing street door;

“on whatsoever errand he may be bent, of pleasure, of grief, perhaps of neither, he too would, if he could, conquer Time, that shall in the end consume and drown him.”

He had reached his own door; a gleam of light on the landing showed him that it was open; he entered hastily and raised his voice. Mrs. Skelton answered the appeal with a startled air. He could see she had but just awakened.

“Why is the door open?” he asked.

“Open, was the door open, sir?”

“I found it so. Who has been here?”

“Only William, sir.”

William was a country nephew who had paid his aunt a visit the day before.

Mr. Owen resumed:

“Pray tell William not to leave the door open another time.”

He walked into his study. Mrs. Skelton followed him, sulking. She thought her own sister's son was as good any day as that little

saucy puss, Phœbe, and with an injured mien, she set down the light on the table. But as she did so she suddenly turned so pale, that Mr. Owen at once looked round. He saw that his desk was broken open, that his papers were scattered about. He went straight to the iron box where, for safety, he held Mr. Rashleigh's packet: it was open; they were gone.

Some can be calm in such moments, and of such was John Owen. He stood on the very brink of ruin, and he measured the yawning pit with unquailing eye. In one brief second he grasped it all: the feigned nephew, the thief, the man he had met, were one. Pursuit was useless; he did not attempt it; he merely turned round to Mrs. Skelton, and said, "This was an impostor, and not your nephew—leave me."

She wanted to reply; but with a quiet gesture he dismissed her. He remained alone with his thoughts—the thoughts of a man suddenly cast

on the barren rock of hopeless ruin. Without proofs the case must fall to the ground, and proofs, now that the letters were gone, he had not. He was doubly ruined; in money, by heavy law expenses; in fame, for having trumped up against a gentleman of name and station a charge he could not support. The contemptible enemy he had almost scorned to chastise, now turned on him, and showed him it is folly to scorn the meanest foe. In vain he looked for some ray of hope to pierce this gloom—he found none. There remained open to him but one course: to bear his fate as became a man.

Gray morn dawned on a sleepless night. The day was dull and cheerless, a day of mist and drizzling rain. Mr. Owen's mind was made up; come what might, he would make a desperate effort, or perish. As the general of old burned his ships, so he cast into the fire the notes of his useless speech, and laid his sole

trust in his native power and daring. Rather pale, but perfectly cool and collected, he proceeded to the court, not without first closely questioning Mrs. Skelton, and obtaining from her all such intelligence as she could give; a limited stock, for, to use her own words, "her mind was all in a tremor."

As Mr. Owen entered the court, he felt a hand laid familiarly on his shoulder. He turned round sharply, and saw Mr. Hanley.

"Owen, my poor fellow," he said, half kindly, half scornfully, "I pity you."

Mr. Owen understood his former friend too well to imagine for a moment that this cautious man could be implicated in the vulgar plot that had, however, proved so successful. He knew the disgust with which Mr. Hanley would have heard of this unprofessional proceeding; this taunt he did not, therefore, attribute to the insolent triumph of a successful schemer; he half smiled as he replied :

“You pity me! Are the Ides of March over?”

Mr. Hanley shrugged his shoulders, and left him to his fate.

The proceedings began. What could Phœbe’s counsel do? He had no witnesses, he had no proofs. He could state facts, and could not prove them, and his adversaries were ready to prove anything. They brought a host of witnesses: Phœbe’s fellow-servants. Their testimony was unanimous on two points. Firstly, she had flirted with Mr. Rashleigh; she had thrown herself in his way; Mr. Rashleigh had ever treated her with virtuous coldness. Secondly, she had been accused of stealing a ring; she had denied it; the ring had been found in her box; she had been disgracefully dismissed.

“Poor girl,” thought Owen, as he listened to one after the other, “of disgrace I have made ruin.”

Some slight discrepancies in the evidence made him suspect that Mrs. Rashleigh's servants had been more or less tampered with; of that circumstance, such as it was, he resolved to make the most. But, indeed, the issue did not seem doubtful. Mr. Hanley looked careless; judge, court, and jury seemed to have but one feeling, and Owen sat vainly gnawing his nether lip, and struggling against fate.

The last witness was called up; Mr. Rashleigh's valet; Mr. Granby, a stylish gentleman's gentleman with a black velvet rose-sprinkled waistcoat, sparkling studs, one kid glove on, and on the little finger of the other hand a glittering ring. He gave his evidence with a knowledge of its importance; he had paid Miss Hanwell some attention; Miss Hanwell had listened to him with favour, but finding Miss Hanwell too light to be his wife, he had not pressed his suit. The worst of this evidence was that it was almost all true. Phœbe's flirtation had begun with the

servant and ended with the master, and Mr. Granby owed her a secret grudge which he could now pay out with interest.

“Truly, the Gods deprive of sense those whom they want to destroy,” thought Owen exulting, as he prepared to cross-examine. He put a few trifling questions in a careless tone, and Mr. Granby faltered in his replies. Mr. Owen persisted, and Mr. Granby drew out a white cambric handkerchief, and wiped his moist brow. Mr. Owen was satisfied, and kindly gave him a few minutes to recover. Mr. Hanley stole a covert look towards him; he did not like the meaning of his eye and lip: they were unrelenting and ironical. Still less did he like the singular perturbation and sudden faintness of Mr. Granby. How would he have liked Mr. Owen’s thoughts? Similarity of height, one or two slight peculiarities of appearance gathered from Mrs. Skelton, the perfect knowledge of cunning men’s folly and imprudence, that never allowed him to think

this is too foolish, too absurd for them to do, had enabled Mr. Owen to detect in Mr. Rashleigh's valet and Mrs. Skelton's William one individual. At once he seized on the circumstance; in a few words vague and unintelligible to every other ear, to Mr. Granby but too plain, he carelessly dropped the most pitiless menaces. When he had wrought on his conscience and fears to the point he wished, that is to say, when Mr. Granby every minute expected to be confronted with Mrs. Skelton, and saw before him nothing but transportation and Botany Bay, Mr. Owen considerably gave him time to think over his desperate case. Mr. Granby had the quickness of many a perverted intellect; he stole up a doubtful look at the saturnine counsel. He read in that face the conditions on which he could purchase silence of the past, and he submitted. He coughed gently; Mr. Owen smiled scornfully; the pact was sealed.

The cross-examination was resumed. Mr.

Owen was inquisitive; Mr. Granby was complaisant. Phoebe's counsel had only to question; Mr. Rashleigh's witness was but too willing to give information. He told the same story, but it was a new edition revised and corrected. He had been his master's rival, then his confident. He knew much, and he told all he knew. In the most positive manner he confirmed the intended marriage to which he had been privy, he told the true story of the ring, and revealed in the whole transaction strange depths of intended profligacy and acted meanness.

The court was scandalised; Mr. Hanley was disgusted; Mr. Hanley had a habit: when a fact was too plain he denied it boldly; it became "a manifest impossibility;" "every man of sense knew the contrary;" "it was notoriously erroneous in sense and in law to suppose," &c. But now Mr. Hanley did not choose to give himself this trouble. Mr. Hanley was huffed, Mr. Hanley was indignant. Mr. Rashleigh had

taken the liberty to impose upon him, and on principle Mr. Hanley never allowed a client to take a liberty. He now gave the imprudent a signal example; he spoke, it is true, but in a manner that showed he abandoned Mr. Rashleigh to his fate.

Mr. Owen rose. He began quietly; he capitulated calmly; he did not exaggerate; he did not comment; the look of his dark eye was passionless; the tone of his voice even and unmoved, almost monotonous. But when from statements he had to launch forth an accusation, he awoke: he felt the moving within him of many powers, some good, some evil; like a dark cloud of birds gathering to their prey, so they now centred on one point. Justice, revenge, the thirst of triumph, the sense of eloquence were with him in that hour. His tall spare figure assumed sudden and severe dignity; his arm scarcely raised, his calm hand, were both pitiless in their condemnation. There was no mercy on

his brow, stern as judgment; none in his look; none in his voice, cold and keen as the double-edged blade of justice. The storm broke forth 'midst the deep hush of the court: there was no thunder of denunciation, no wakening of the passions, no scurrilous abuse,—no, it was a storm all lightning, flashing across a dark sky, all sarcasm and all scorn—awful in its unnatural calmness.

The vials of wrath were indeed on that day poured forth on the doomed head of Rashleigh Rashleigh. The cowardly slanderer of Grace Lee was hunted out of every nook, seized, grappled with, prostrated, held up aloft in all his meanness to the scoffing gaze of judge, jury, court; then dropped down again with derisive contempt, a miserable, a dishonoured, a ruined man.

All was over. The jury had given their verdict, and healed Phœbe's wounded feelings with two hundred pounds; rather a small sum, but Mr. Owen did not think of this. He left the court;

his mind was in a fever, for though his blood remained cool, and his nerves were too firmly strung to be thus easily shaken, he knew that he had achieved one of those things that are the victories of a man's life. As he stood looking out for a cab, for it was pouring fast, Mr. Hanley put his head out of his carriage and said, "Come with me, I shall put you down at your own door."

"Thank you," replied Owen, stepping in, and accepting his late foe's offer as carelessly as it was made.

"And suppose," continued Mr. Hanley, as they drove off, "suppose you first try with me what sort of fare Monsieur Jean Baptiste has provided for us—eh?"

"Really I do not mind," placidly answered Owen.

"You remember Monsieur Jean Baptiste, do you not, and the Ambroisie à la Lee, and the oysters—eh? Awful night."

Oh, yes, he remembered, he remembered but too well. The question stung him in the very midst of his triumph. Where was she on this dreary night? and without thinking of giving Mr. Hanley a reply, he looked at the streets deluged with rain, and at the fleeting figures passing by. Mr. Hanley went on talking until the carriage drew up at his door.

Mr. Hanley had a handsome house, and Mr. Hanley lived not fashionably—not stylishly, but with every one of the luxurious comforts of life around him. His rooms were not to be looked at, but to be lived in; his chairs were not Gothic, Renaissance, or Louis XV., but chairs to sit in, made from his own patterns and designs. His china and plate were old-fashioned; but who had so choice a cellar,—who gave the pearl of French cooks such wages,—who eat such dinners daily as Mr. Hanley?

On this occasion Monsieur Jean Baptiste had surpassed himself. To cook a dinner for Mr.

Hanley was a labour of love, for Mr. Hanley could appreciate genius; but what would have been the gifted Frenchman's feelings, could he have beheld the barbarous fashion in which John Owen treated his dishes. He eat of them to be sure; but as Monsieur Jean Baptiste would have said, "*il y a manger et manger*;" and as Mr. Owen was tired and hungry, he eat after the fashion of a hungry man. The meal over, he sat back in a deep chair and looked at the blazing fire, whilst Mr. Hanley, on the other side, drank his wine, and became friendly and confidential. Of the day's contest he scarcely spoke, save to give his unfortunate client a sort of contemptuous kick, after which he treated Mr. Owen to some good and shrewd advice, which wound up in the following manner.

"Owen, I like you. You are clever; you are shrewd; you are persevering and unconquered. The frowns of Fortune affect you no more than her smiles. Do not imagine that

you owe anything to the evidence of that fellow, Granby. Judge —— is a fool, and took it in; *I* could have upset it if I chose. No; if you triumphed to-day, it was because like Wellington at the battle of Waterloo, you would not be beaten: but for all that, do not think you have done with the world. You will find how hard it is to be famous and poor,—a not unfrequent conjunction. You are now above the sort of things you were glad enough of till yesterday; and you have not yet obtained the firm position of an older fame. Yours is young and tender, and requires careful nursing; which, unless you are a fool, I will give.”

“And pray how so?” asked Owen, looking up somewhat surprised.

“I will lend you five hundred pounds.”

Now, if after a good dinner, Mr. Hanley could be said to love anything, it was money; Mr. Owen looked the surprise he did not express. Mr. Hanley coolly explained his conduct.

"Perhaps," he said, "you wonder I never made this offer when, in one sense, you were more in want of money than you are now; but you could not have repaid it then, and giving is not in my way. Now I know that you can repay me, and that before long."

"But, Mr. Hanley," perversely objected Owen, "what if I should die before I can repay you?"

"Pooh! pooh!" hastily replied Mr. Hanley, "a fine healthy fellow like you, who brings to his dinner that best of all sauces, the Lacedemonian; a man in the prime of strength and life, is not going to die just to cheat me out of my money."

"Not precisely for that purpose," drily replied Owen; "but I may have some secret complaint unknown even to myself; or I may be killed, run over at an unlucky corner, drowned, shot, et cetera."

"The devil take your et ceteras," hotly said Mr. Hanley, fidgetting on his chair, and half-

repenting his generous offer. "Why should you be drowned or shot? Are you so mad as to think of another duel? Come man, say yes or no. Will you have the five hundred pounds; on your I. O. U. of course?"

Mr. Owen thought awhile; then accepted. Mr. Hanley wrote out the cheque; he gave a receipt, and there the matter ended. The rest of the evening produced nothing worthy of note, save that when they parted Mr. Hanley warned his guest to mind the carriages and the corners; and that with more irony than gratitude, Owen promised to do so. And thus with fame and money closed the day that had opened with ruin and disgrace.

CHAPTER X.



AND thus it came to pass, that Mr. Owen suddenly found himself what is called famous; that is to say, known within a certain circle, ignored without. He wished for no more. To succeed and have power, not to be world-known, had ever been his ambition; and now reader, ask not to follow this worldly man in his dealings with the world. He thought more of rising than of making money, and in this he succeeded. His name soon won weight, and became a thing of strength. But to maintain it he had to battle perpetually, for he was feared and rebelled against. This sort of war suited him. He liked to crush envy and

jealousy, to outwit the cunning, to humble the haughty; for his was the domineering temper, which entire submission would weary, and that delights in the storm and tumult of battle.

Other incidents that seemed to him then of little moment, but that were not without their influence, blended with his life. When everything was over, Mr. Owen recalled Phoebe from her country exile; informed her of her success, and kindly said that until she could find some other home, she might stay with Mrs. Skelton.

Phoebe, bewildered with her good fortune, could scarcely thank him. Her two hundred pounds were inexhaustible wealth; she looked upon life with altered eyes. She had once humbly thought that to be allowed to stay with Mr. Owen and Mrs. Skelton as maid-of-all-work, would be too much happiness; but now Phoebe got upon a chair in Mrs. Skelton's room, looked at herself in the little mirror, and settled it that a pretty girl with two hundred pounds,

should not throw herself away in that fashion. Strange ideas floated through her brain.

Phœbe was of Miss Lee's height, and not unlike her in figure. She wore a dark dress that had once been hers, and she plaited her brown tresses in the same fashion. She was much prettier than Grace, though not so graceful, but when she sat or stood with her face half averted, the resemblance of colour and outline was striking, and could not be seen by Mr. Owen without some emotion. This Phœbe had seen; she now drew her own conclusions. Mr. Owen looked at her, Mr. Owen was in love. Mr. Owen never spoke, never behaved like Mr. Rashleigh; Mr. Owen's passion was discreet and honourable. He was not so grand a gentleman as Mr. Rashleigh, but he was still a gentleman, and Phœbe felt born to become a lady. Everything was soon settled. When Mr. Owen's passion had overcome his bashfulness—for he was a great deal more bashful than Mr. Rashleigh—he would

declare it in some such words as: "Will you be mine, my dear Phœbe, in this world and the next?" The rest was clear. Chambers for him in town, with Mrs. Skelton — Phœbe liked Mrs. Skelton, she was a respectable, trustworthy person—and in Bayswater, or Kensington, or Notting Hill, or some such genteel place, a house for Mrs. John Herbert Owen—Herbert was pretty and fashionable—with her maid, and a nurse for the children. "Yes, that would do." And with this conclusion, Phœbe got down from her chair.

And now, quite unconsciously, Phœbe became grand and condescending. She abstained on principle from servile tasks, begged that Mrs. Skelton would call her Miss Hanwell, and dropped such hints and took such airs, that the housekeeper's heart well-nigh burst with jealousy and grief. A time had been when Mrs. Skelton would not have borne this, but the affair of William had sorely humbled her pride, and Phœbe was allowed to have her way.

"Really, Mr. Owen is very long about it," thought Phœbe, one morning.

Mr. Owen was at that moment coming in; as he passed by her, he said: "Phœbe, just step into the study; I want to speak to you."

Phœbe obeyed; they were alone; she felt nervous, for now the moment was come.

"Miss Lee," John Owen was going to begin, when, as her name trembled on his lips, the flush of an involuntary emotion rose to his cheek and brow.

"Really," thought Phœbe, "I have known some bashful gentlemen, but Mr. Owen beats them all." And, mischievously bent on finishing him, she put forth a dainty little foot, clothed in a red and gold Venetian slipper. At once Mr. Owen's eyes became rivetted on this other memorial of Grace, but, raising them, and detecting the half smile on Phœbe's face, he thought himself discovered, and said abruptly,

"Do you remember Mrs. Gerald Lee?"

This was not much like "My dearest Phœbe,

will you be mine in this world and the next?" At first she was disconcerted, but rallying, she said, tartly—

"I do remember the lady, sir."

"Do you know anything of her now?"

"Can't say I do," loftily replied Phœbe, rolling a stray curl on her finger. She wondered at Mr. Owen, she did.

"Could you learn anything concerning her?"

Phœbe stiffly said she would see, and thus the conversation ended.

"He has not half so much spirit as Mr. Rashleigh," thought Phœbe; "but it's all his bashfulness; he wanted to speak, but not feeling equal to it, he brought up Miss Lily."

Nevertheless, she fulfilled her promise, and the same day found out one of Mrs. Gerald Lee's discharged attendants, who told her how gay Mrs. Lee was, and how she and Mr. Lee had their little tiffs, and finally, for further information referred her to a certain Mrs.

Jennings, who was not to be found. This intelligence Phœbe the same day repeated to Mr. Owen. He seemed interested, and urged her to continue her researches. Phœbe smiled: of course this was but a pretence to see her with more liberty. It looked like it; twice a-day was Phœbe summoned to the study; in the morning to be reminded to find out Mrs. Jennings; in the evening to be asked if Mrs. Jennings had been found.

The little flirt liked it extremely, and was so imprudent and coquettish, that at length Mr. Owen's eyes opened. He was more amused than angry.

"First Tom, then Mr. Granby, then Mr. Rashleigh, then John Owen; really, Phœbe, you are too kind; and much chance there is of Mrs. Jennings, whilst your head is full of such fancies."

He quietly set about removing them; but Phœbe clung to her illusions; she persisted in thinking Mr. Owen bashful, and gave him such

encouragement as modesty permits, for spite her folly she was honest; a light gold coin, but true gold stamped with the royal image. Mr. Owen got impatient, and as he knew well enough the sort of passion she felt for him, and saw that Mr. Rashleigh had not cured her, he resolved that he should. He succeeded at least in enlightening her. She was with him in the study; he had been saying something rather kind, but the tone of his voice made her look up. He sat back in his chair, his look, his smile, half ironical, and half careless, cut her to the quick. She guessed the whole truth, and faltering something about Mrs. Skelton, she turned to the door. He called her back. "Phœbe," he said, seriously, "you are a good girl, but you have a great fault: you do not know your true friends. Mrs. Jones was harsh, but faithful: you preferred Mrs. Rashleigh, and now I half think that, to a rough, but true friend like me, you would prefer a smooth, false one, like her son."

"No, indeed, sir," replied Phœbe, reddening. "From Mr. Rashleigh I received evil; from you good; which I never shall forget; and perhaps, too, I may oblige you, sir, in the way you shall best like, and you least expect."

"And pray how so?" asked Mr. Owen, with a careless smile.

"I shall try and get you some token of Miss Lee."

Mr. Owen started, and turned crimson. He had not expected this home thrust. Before he could attempt to reply, Phœbe had dropped him a curtsey, and was gone.

When he came in that evening, Mrs. Skelton's face beamed with joy and news. The young woman had packed up her things, and gone off in a cab.

"Where to?" he asked hastily.

"She did not say, sir, but——"

"Is the dinner ready?" he interrupted.

"Just ready, sir; the young woman——"

"It is all right," he said drily.

He looked careless, yet he was sorry. He had begun to like Phœbe more than he knew. He missed her, her pretty face, her coquettish ways, her young voice ; and he thought Mrs. Skelton browner and older than ever. But the feeling soon wore off ; Phœbe was missed a few days, then forgotten, and Mrs. Skelton returned, in her master's eyes, at least, to her pristine hue and appearance.

He had plenty else to think of besides a flirting girl. He had his search for Grace to pursue ; his profession, his ambition, the world, to absorb him. Mr. Hanley helped him little. He thought it more entertaining to see him fight his way unaided and alone. Now and then he asked him to dinner, with the intimation that Monsieur Jean Baptiste was going to surpass himself. Twice other persons were present.

The first time Mr. Owen, who was not in a good temper—he had that same day experienced

another disappointment about Grace—was so disagreeable, yet withal so brilliant and eloquent in his very bitterness, that Mr. Hanley rubbed his hands with glee. The second time, Mr. Owen not feeling inclined to be ill-tempered for any one's pleasure save his own, dropped the proud overbearing man of talent to become the cool man of the world. The man who has his own opinions, and who cares too little for the opinions of others to take the trouble of contradicting. In short, he assumed the calm superiority which passes under the epithet of "gentlemanly." He had never tried it before, and knew not it was so easy. "And is it thus?" he thought as he went home, "that with a few advantages of birth and fortune, and that ease of manner which the habit of command imparts, is it thus that men persuade others, ay, and themselves too, that they are of a race formed to rule the world. That to them, as to their centre, should tend creatures and things. In

what was I better than any I saw this evening, and yet because I assumed it a sort of superiority was granted to me. All that the philosopher, the poet, the misanthrope have said, has not yet attained the full measure of this world's meanness !”

These were the thoughts that made him turn back to Grace with double longing ; that gave more eagerness to his search — that deepened its ardour. He did not trust his own efforts ; he employed an agent of tried fidelity and secrecy. He paid him well and bade him spare nothing. Mr. Durrant obeyed him strictly : he hunted up and down through the metropolis ; he took journeys into the country ; he displayed the most eager zeal ; he spent plenty of money, but he did not find Grace. At length he furnished a clue which Mr. Owen, as usual followed up ; for to himself he always reserved ultimate discovery. “A lady named Miss Lee, who has seen better days, who supports herself by fancy work,

lives at No.—, — Street, Kilburn. She is under thirty, tall, dark and lady-like." Mr. Owen took a cab and drove off. He found the street, the house, the number; a poor but decent place where Grace might hide her fallen fortunes. With a beating heart he ascended the staircase; on the second floor, he paused and knocked. No one answered. He knocked again; still in vain: he knocked a third time; the opposite door opened, and a slatternly-looking woman gazed at him curiously.

"Do you know if Miss Lee is at home?" he asked.

"At home!" she said, smiling. "She is gone."

"When—how?"

"Oh, it was done all in a mighty hurry. She heard, I believe, that some one inquired for her yesterday, and she was off in the evening."

"You know where?" said Owen, fixing his keen look full on her.

"P'raps I do, sir," she answered, smiling.

He slipped some silver in her hand.

She smiled again and resumed. "The old woman's son who sells apples at the corner carried Miss Lee's box."

"Thank you," he said, and turned away, hastily.

The woman shook her head. "She always thought there was something sly about that Miss Lee."

Mr. Owen found the applewoman at her stall. On hearing his errand, and the promised reward, she flew on the wings of Mammon—and he owns as good and nimble a pair as ever adorned Cupid's back—to find her son. The youth was tossing half-pence in the neighbouring lane; at first he flatly refused to leave off, but a slap on the cheek and a box on the other ear having reduced him to blubbering obedience, he declared he did not know Miss Lee's street or number, for the plain reason that he knew not how to read.

"He never would learn," mournfully said his mother; "he never would do anything but eat the apples. That boy, sir, broke his father's heart, and is breaking mine fast."

"You never sent me to school, you know you never did," began the boy, turning round, half fiercely, "you know——"

"Take me to the house," interrupted Mr. Owen. "You shall sit on the cabman's box, ride the whole way, and earn five shillings."

Joseph knew the five shillings would not be for him; but of the ride by the cabman no one could deprive him. He accepted eagerly, and at once rode off on this seat of glory, the envy and admiration of his late companions.

In holding forth this inducement to the boy's ambition, Mr. Owen had shown his knowledge of human nature. The result exceeded his wishes. Joseph anxious for a view of the shipping and the docks, remembered that somewhere near there he had taken the lady's box. This whim being gratified, he was seized with a rural fancy, and longed for the romantic heaths of Hampstead, and the fresh breeze of Highgate Hill. Both wishes were indulged. They were

succeeded by a philosophic desire to observe the crowded thoroughfares of his native city. At length as the day wore thus, the cabman lost patience, stepped down from his box, put his head into the cab, and, significantly jerking his thumb over his right shoulder, hoarsely informed Mr. Owen "that the chap was gammoning him. You'll say, p'raps, mind yer own business, but I can't stand seeing a gentleman gammoned in that way. I can't, there."

"He is young; his memory may improve," kindly said Owen.

"I'd improve his memory for him," grumbled the cabman, resuming his seat.

But Joseph's memory instead of improving became worse, and towards supper-time failed him utterly. Again the cabman put his head in with the information "that the chap said he couldn't remember, and wanted to get down."

"Let him," phlegmatically replied Owen, and he too alighted.

“My young friend,” he said, mildly; “I promised you five shillings and a ride; the ride you have had, and here is the money. But when people serve me so well, I pay double. Another ride, as long as the first, you must now take with me.”

Before Joseph could object, a strong hand had lifted him up and dropped him in the cab, Mr. Owen had stepped in, and the cabman had driven off at full speed. Joseph kicked and screamed to no purpose. Mr. Owen took out a cigar—spoke of a ten or fifteen miles’ ride in the country—after which he kept a profound silence. London was left behind; Blackheath appeared in the dim moonlight. Joseph saw it was no joke, and sullenly gave in. He now remembered that the lady had gone to Camberwell, and he felt sure he could know the house again. Mr. Owen begged him to mind, and hinted that should his memory fail once more, the ten miles’ ride might be lengthened to twenty. But Joseph was positive: to Camber-

well they went. The cabman felt sure "the gentleman was gammoned again;" Mr. Owen was of a different opinion, and indeed the first question he asked of a woman standing at the door of the house pointed out by Joseph, proved that the lad had not deceived him.

"Miss Lee? yes, sir, she's my lodger. On the first floor; she came last night. That's the boy who brought her box."

Mr. Owen released Joseph, who shot off like an arrow, and hastened up the dark staircase; a door stood ajar; he entered; by the light of a tallow candle he saw a woman sitting at a table with her back towards him. On hearing him she turned round.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she asked; she raised the light to look at him; it fell on her face. Ay, she was tall, dark, lady-like, and still young; but she was not Grace Lee. With a pang of disappointment, he apologised for his intrusion and retreated.

"The chap's off, sir," said the cabman, "I guess he had enough of it."

Mr. Owen did not answer: these were the things that taunted and tormented passion into a sort of frenzy; for in this one incident we have but related the wearisome story of many a previous day; of a search ever baffled, yet ever keen. "Another disappointment," he thought, as he went up the staircase of his own home: "how long is this to last, how long?"

He found Mrs. Skelton in culinary distress; the dinner was ruined with waiting—he interrupted her lamentations, and asked for the meal such as it was, then entered his study. A letter awaited him. Impatiently he broke the seal—and read:

"If Mr. Owen will give himself the trouble to call on Miss Bell, who resides on the second floor of his house, he will hear of something to his advantage."

"Truly a very interesting piece of information,"

he thought, tossing away the letter with some scorn. "Miss Bell may wait."

He sat down in one of his darkest moods. He felt as much anger as tenderness towards Grace. Why was he thus compelled to seek one who fled from him; to love where he found nothing but indifference? As he thought thus, his eye fell on an open volume on the table. He looked at it like one transfixed, then his voice rang loud and clear: "Mrs. Skelton!"

Mrs. Skelton had never been called so before. In her fright she dropped the decanter of water she was putting on the table. Before she could have had time to answer his call, Owen stood at the dining-room door. He was very pale.

"Who has been here?" he asked.

"La! sir, you gave me such a fright," said Mrs. Skelton, laying her hand on her heart, "I am sure I never broke a decanter these ten years."

"Mrs. Skelton, who has been here?"

"Dear me, sir, no one like. Only as I was cheapening a bunch of carrots, I heard, 'Down, sir!' and looking round I saw the very last person I thought of. Well, I am sure, I have the worst memory for names, to be sure."

"Mrs. Skelton, was it or was it not Miss Lee?"

"Miss Lee, to be sure. Well, the dog would not let her be quiet; he was so mad with joy; so she had to come up and sit a while in your study, whilst I coaxed him away with a bone."

"And where is she now?" interrupted Owen, looking round.

"Why she is gone, sir."

"Gone! Where does she live?"

"Dear me, sir, how should I know?"

"You did not ask?"

"La! sir, how could I think of taking such a liberty?"

The day's disappointment was nothing to this;

it was some time before he could command himself sufficiently to ask how Grace looked. Mrs. Skelton thought she looked well; she was certain at least that she was in mourning, and could give him positive information concerning the depth of her crape. The keenest cross-examination produced no more.

Mr. Owen returned to his study; he sat down in his chair; he took up the book that had drawn his attention: one of the legal works Grace had formerly given him, and in which whilst she sat talking to Mrs. Skelton, she had traced in capricious arabesque letters the words: "Grace Lee, her gift."

And so she had been there, and whilst he wasted time in vainly seeking her, she was to be found in his own home. The chair in which she had sat, the book she had touched, the dull looking-glass that had given back her image, had kept nothing of her presence for his return. Ah! if some kind spirit had but brought him back as

she sat there ! How well he could imagine that meeting ! The tantalising witch Fancy, not the benign genius that whispers of what may be, but she who the better to torment paints in such vivid colours all that might have been, she whose sweetest cup is poison, was with him in that hour. He felt in a fever of excitement ; he could not sit, stand, or remain quiet ; his body like his blood must be in motion. As he walked up and down the room, he caught sight of Miss Bell's letter on the floor. He picked it up, he read it again. His blood cooled down ; his keen shrewd mind fastened on this object. " Who knows," he thought, " that there may not be something in this. Miss Bell is a fool or an impostor ; in neither character do I fear her. A quarter past eight : why not see to this at once ? "

" Oh ! dear sir," cried Mrs. Skelton, as he crossed the dining room, " the dinner is just ready ! "

"Let it wait!" was his laconic reply.

She wanted to argue; the door had already closed on him. He had to act, and fatigue, disappointment, hunger were forgotten, for action was indeed his true life.

CHAPTER XI.



THE second floor was soon reached. A sleepy-looking servant ushered Mr. Owen into a dull-looking room. It was vacant, but from the next apartment he heard a sharp voice, exclaiming—

“Jane, who is it? Did I not tell you over and over never to let in any one? I know no Mr. Owen; tell him so, and you may add that it is impertinent and intrusive to call on a lady at this hour, or rather—stay—no—stop, Jane, I shall go myself.”

The door opened, and a tall, gaunt lady, well worn in years, entered. At once Mr. Owen felt that he had already seen her, but where he knew not. As he rose and bowed, he fastened a keen

look on her ; she returned it with something like defiance.

“ Well, sir ? ” she said, aggressively.

He did not reply. He was still vainly seeking when and where they had met.

“ I should like to know your errand ? ” resumed Miss Bell, rather loftily.

“ I perceive you do not remember me,” slowly said Mr. Owen, to gain time to remember her.

Miss Bell gave him a disdainful look. “ Remember you ? No, certainly.”

“ Try,” composedly said Mr. Owen, resuming his seat.

Miss Bell looked amazed, and in her amazement sank down into the depths of an arm-chair. Thence she gazed at her visitor sternly and fixedly. But her memory availed her not ; either his was more faithful, or the power of his strong will extended even to this faithless friend, for suddenly he remembered all ; his heart

leaped, his eyes lit, at the discovery, and the hopes it held forth.

“And so, Miss Blount,” he said, with a careless smile, “you have really forgotten John Owen?”

He saw her start uneasily, but she quickly checked herself, and after a brief pause, said, in tones of ice :

“My name is Bell, sir.”

“Bell or Blount. Yes; I was with Doctor Marsh in Wales, when you came to fetch your young ward, Miss Blount—”

“I know no Miss Blount.”

“Who is now Mrs. Gerald Lee.”

“Sir, you speak idly,” said Miss Bell, with a wave of her hand.

But Mr. Owen was not daunted. He had come on a vague chance, now definite, and not all Miss Blount’s frowns should, he resolved, conquer him. He drew his chair to the fire, and leaning against the mantelpiece, he smiled, and said :

“And so, Miss Bell, you are not that Miss Blount who called poor Doctor Marsh an idiot, and the Reverend Doctor Crankey a pedant, and who, giving me a slap on the shoulder, said : ‘Mr. John Owen, I like you ; when you go to Buckinghamshire, come and see me.’”

“And did you go and see that lady, sir ?” asked Miss Blount, with a stern smile.

“No, for I never went to that county ; but, discovering her to reside here in London, I concluded——”

“It was the same thing as Buckinghamshire. Well, sir, if I were Miss Blount, I should be of a different opinion. I should say, ‘you were invited to Buckinghamshire, go to Buckinghamshire.’”

Mr. Owen rose and took his hat.

“Where are you going ?” asked Miss Bell.

“To Buckinghamshire, of course.”

“It is a long way off. Sit down again, Mr. Owen ; let this be Buckinghamshire ; to

oblige you, I do not mind being Miss Blount for to-night. Shall I do as well?"

"Better," he replied, resuming his seat; "for Miss Blount was an odd person. One never knew when, where, how to take her. She was sharp, she was——"

"You forget, sir," drily interrupted the lady, "that I am Miss Blount to-night."

"Not in the least; for, with the privileges and familiarity of old acquaintance, I shall venture to hint, that the pleasure of coming down to Buckinghamshire to see you made me forget taking my dinner."

"Jane," said Miss Blount, raising her voice, "bring in the supper-tray."

Jane obeyed, and in a few minutes Miss Bell, alias Miss Blount, and John Owen, were partaking of a cold joint, with a fruit-pie waiting its doom on the side table, and an uncorked bottle of claret gently warming by the fire.

The darkest day has the brightest sun; the

most gloomy tempers have the gayest fits of mirth. When he liked, Mr. Owen could be as genial and as free as the most generous wine; for his nature, though dark and stern, was also one of passion and ardour. He had set his mind on subduing his bitter hostess, and with that intuitive knowledge of character nothing can teach, he had seen at a glance the only way to do so. The ground he had won he had now to make good; he tried and succeeded. Her sour features relaxed; the dawn of a smile came on her withered face; once or twice she laughed, then stopped short in the midst of her own merriment, amazed at the unusual sound. And still Mr. Owen went on, free, gay, brilliant, laying himself out to charm this ancient lady, as he had never laid himself out to charm the fairest and youngest of her sex. At eleven he rose to leave her.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, as they parted, “I know not with what motives you came here

to-night. Say nothing; I do not ask you. I do not want to know. You have chased away some gloomy and bitter thoughts; come again, if you like; but remember, I am Miss Bell, not Miss Blount."

"Why so?" he promptly asked.

"It pleases me," was her laconic answer. "You may call yourself Smith, Johnson, anything you like, for all I care. Is it aught to you that I choose to be Bell, instead of Blount?"

"Nothing at all," he replied, frankly.

"Well, then, it is settled thus. When you choose to sup with me, your company shall be welcome. You may find me sharp, as full of angles as a geometrical figure, do not mind; at bottom I like you. And now, good-night; I dare say you have a long walk home."

She gave him her hand, he smiled; but he never said, "I live in your house."

Mr. Owen again sat in his study. He had by

the merest chance procured an old scrap of Phœbe's writing, a washerwoman's bill, and by comparing it with the letter he had received, he had identified it to be the same hand. For what reason could she refer him to Miss Blount, but to fulfill her promise and procure him some token of Grace. And who so likely to know where Miss Lee was to be found as the aunt of Lily? "She does know," he thought, walking up and down the room, "and she must and shall tell me; when, it matters little. I am patient,—I can bide my time."

To patience Mr. Owen added prudence; he had sufficient self-restraint not to go near Miss Bell for two days. He then found her sitting grim and lone by her fireside. Her face relaxed on seeing him; almost her first words were:

"You have not supped, have you?"

"No, but I have dined."

"Pooh! dinner only gives a better appetite for supper. Jane bring in the supper-tray."

In it came, a cold game-pie.

“There,” said Miss Blount, as it was set before her guest; and she evidently expected him to begin an attack. Mr. Owen felt embarrassed. He had imprudently dined before coming up; even to please Miss Bell he could not sup. He said so; she half frowned and insisted, but not being able to prevail, she ordered away the supper with an offended air. It required all Mr. Owen’s tact and care to remove this unfavourable impression; however he succeeded, and Miss Blount’s harsh features resumed something like favour.

“Mr. Owen,” she said, in her abrupt way, “I gathered from some words you dropped the other evening, that you had left medicine for the bar. You must not mind if I tell you,” she added, glancing at his somewhat shabby attire, for Mr. Owen had scorned to improve it with improvement of fortune; “that I do not think you a thriving man. Now perhaps I may be of use to you and perhaps

I may not. Hear me and then reply. I have had plenty of law in my time; but some kind friends of mine think I have not had enough. There is talk of a certain company causing a certain person to be locked up in a lunatic asylum, and thus getting rid of her once for all. I cannot employ you, you are too inexperienced—besides you would not do at all; but there is in this very house a man of your name, a man who has risen to sudden repute in an obscure case—on him I have cast my eye. When the time is come I shall speak to him; and now I want to know this: Can I be of use to you with him?”

“Humph?” replied Mr. Owen, biting his lip to repress a smile; “there is but one objection; I happen to be that very Mr. Owen on whom you have cast your eye, Miss Bell.”

Miss Bell gazed at him with incredulous surprise. She had looked on him as a sort of hungry shabby lawyer. As such she had

felt for him the contemptuous kindness most people feel for a striving man of talent; and now he proved to be both eminent and, so far as opinion could judge, prosperous.

"You," she said at length, "you are the Mr. Owen of Phœbe Hang—, something or other, *versus* Rashleigh Rashleigh?"

"Why not?" he composedly asked.

But Miss Blount frowned; all kindness vanished from her face; she looked at him sternly.

"Mr. Owen," she said, ironically, "I appreciate your great kindness in calling on a poor solitary woman like me—but I am not accustomed to so much condescension from successful people. You must have had a motive, you must have expected something or other from me; pray let me know at once."

Mr. Owen laughed with seeming disdain. "Expected something from you, Miss Blount," he said, "and pray what could I expect from

you? You do not seem rich; you are not influential. You had a young ward whom you reared—did she not on the first opportunity, forsake you for a rich half-sister? Then what should I, a stranger, seek from you? If I were the obscure, struggling barrister you took me for, and which indeed I was not so long ago; I might, according to your estimate of men, call on you for the chance of a stray supper, of the stray loan of a five pound note to relieve some passing necessity. But pray what interested motive can I have now?"

"Mr. Owen, you argue like a man of the law. I, woman-like, go by the instinct which tells me I am not sufficiently young, amiable, or lovely to draw you here. However, you are not inclined to tell me; let it pass; I dare say I shall find it out: and now let us talk of other things, of the weather if you like."

Mr. Owen did his best to remove this unfavourable impression. When he thought he

had succeeded, he put in the most careless tone a careless question: "What had become of Mrs. Gerald Lee?" Miss Blount looked slowly up, gazed steadfastly in his face, and deliberately replied, "I know nothing of her; she may be living, she may be dead."

"But you do know," he thought, and he set his wits to work out a way, whereby to discover what, for some reason or other, Miss Blount would not tell. But his ingenuity, his *finesse* availed little; either Miss Blount knew nothing, or she was as keen and as shrewd as himself. In vain he tried to surprise a confession, to wrest an acknowledgment; she sat immovable and grim as a statue of stone.

Mr. Owen persisted, not merely this time, but many another time; then he grew impatient and irritated and forsook Miss Blount.

Weeks had elapsed when he remembered her existence. With the remembrance came the careless wish to know what had become

of her. At once he went up. He found Miss Blount more grim than ever; she would not speak, she would scarcely look. He was more amused than offended; and from the very spirit of contradiction he chose to remain and talk, little as she seemed to relish his company. At length he prevailed; the cloud vanished from her brow, a smile came to her thin lips, and with a half-smile she said,

“And so, Mr. Owen, you have actually remembered that Miss Bell was alive! I wonder how long it is since you came near me? A month at least. Do not think I wonder! The marvel is that you ever came again, not having got from me what you wanted.”

“And pray what was that?” he boldly asked.

“What I am going to give you now,” she replied; “what I would have given you long ago, if, instead of endeavouring to wrest it from me by unfair means, you had frankly asked me for it, as a thing you cared for. However, I relented, or

rather to punish you, I resolved to gratify your wishes, but just then you came no more. Here it is," she added, taking from her desk a folded paper, "it has been ready for weeks. No thanks, I am doing you no kindness. I know your idol, and despise it; a mean blue-eyed thing."

Mr. Owen was unfolding the paper she had given him. He looked up:

"Miss Lee—blue-eyed!" he echoed, forgetting his usual caution.

"What!" cried Miss Blount, confounded. "It is not Lily—it is that ugly little girl with the bold black eyes."

"In the first place," drily replied Mr. Owen, annoyed at having betrayed himself unnecessarily, "she is not a little girl, but a woman of twenty-five, at least. In the second, beauty is a matter of taste."

"Well, then, Mr. Owen, your taste is but an indifferent one. She is plain, she has lost her money, the world speaks ill of her: however, you

have a right to please yourself ; but you need not treasure up that paper ; it is worthless. It is the direction of Mrs. Gerald Lee, true enough ; but of that Miss Lee, whom you are seeking—neither she nor any one knows any thing.”

Mr. Owen hastily glanced at the paper he still held. It was, indeed, in every sense worthless. It gave him the direction of Mrs. Lee, in a house to which she had retired immediately after her widowhood, but where he knew that Phœbe had vainly sought her. The pain of the disappointment rose to his brow as he crushed the paper in his hand.

“Worthless, indeed !” he exclaimed, with ill-suppressed irritation ; “why, Mrs. Gerald Lee has left that place months.”

“And I have burned all her subsequent letters, unread, so you see there is no remedy.”

She spoke with a coolness that increased his irritation. He bit his lip not to say that which

he should regret; but his angry look betrayed his secret indignation.

“Well, well,” said Miss Blount, who seemed rather amused; “I cannot imagine why you have set your mind on that ugly little girl. She is brown.”

“Pale, you mean.”

“Brown. She is thin.”

“Thin!” he indignantly interrupted. “No, indeed.”

“Come, come, wax not wroth. I shall say no more. Seek for her, since such is your fancy, and good luck attend your search.”

“And you will help me?”

“I!”

“You! and if a letter comes you will neither burn it nor send it back unread.”

“How do you know that?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Then, I suppose it must be so,” replied Miss Blount, with a smile that showed how far he had

already won on the good-will of this not very amiable lady.

There is no interest like the human interest. No tale can charm, no tragic art can move like some page of every-day life in which the human interest enters. Spite of her years, spite of her experience, spite of a temper soured by the vicissitudes of a troubled life, Miss Blount actually became interested in Mr. Owen's search for Grace Lee. She listened to his schemes, she added her suggestions, and she even began to look out impatiently for the letters she had once disdained. Every evening when he came up, she looked in his face to see what news he brought, and finding nothing there but disappointment, she either bitterly abused Lily and Grace as the cause, or railed at him for his folly.

"What can you see in that ugly little girl?" was her invariable argument; "I am amazed at your bad taste."

Mr. Owen neither justified Grace nor his own

taste, but he smiled with the consciousness of superior knowledge ; and Miss Blount, unable to account for so strange an infatuation, angrily declared he must be bewitched.

One evening he went up to her, as usual, gloomy and discontented. As usual, her look sought his.

“ Well ? ” she said, interrogatively.

“ Nothing,” he replied moodily. He sat by the window in the pale twilight : he leaned his forehead on his hand ; his face looked harsher and sterner than ever ; every dark line seemed cut in stone ; his mouth was closed and silent ; his eyes were fixed and absent. For a while Miss Blount looked at him, then she said slowly :

“ Well, I have had better luck than you to-day, for here is a letter from Mrs. Gerald Lee, in which you will find certain tokens of her half sister —— ”

She did not conclude. Magic had never wrought such a change. He had turned round

like one transformed ; his eyes beamed with delight ; his lips trembled ; every feature quivered with sudden joy.

“ Well, to be sure, Love is a mighty God ! ” said Miss Blount, wonderingly. “ And what will you do now that you have found your Divinity ? ” she added, after a pause.

Mr. Owen was carefully putting away Mrs. Gerald Lee’s letter.

“ What shall I do ? ” he repeated slowly, “ why, Miss Bell, I think I shall try not to be under the necessity of finding her again. That seems the most sensible plan, does it not ? ”

He was again quite cool, quite collected.

CHAPTER XII.

WITH a moved and beating heart Mr. Owen stood before the abode of Grace. At the angle of a lonely road, isolated and drearily rising on the sky, he saw a mansion that was ancient, and that had never been handsome, in a state of irreparable decay. Tall dark trees grew around it, and cast their sombre shadow on its brick walls. The upper windows were broken or mended with boards; in one or two of the lower ones there were curtains, but the very door had a mouldering look, and the unsteady stone steps were green and grass-grown. The whole place had a deserted and melancholy aspect. He knocked, but received no reply. A spider was spinning her web

across the door; some other mode of ingress there must be. He went round the house; he found a flight of steps leading to an open door, then an ill-lit passage, ending in a dull looking room. He entered, but saw no one. The room was dark and bare. "And is this," he thought, "the home that has replaced the luxurious mansion in Hyde Park—the pleasant house in Wales?"

"Dear me, it is Mr. Owen!" said a light voice behind.

He turned round and saw the lovely laughing face of Lily. She stood looking at him curiously, holding a young child by the hand.

"Is it chance, or is it Christian charity brings you?" she resumed, "and how are you? sit down. Oh, dear!" she added, sinking down on an old sofa with an ill-repressed yawn; "what an awfully dull place; and Grace, who would fain persuade me that it is quite delightful."

Mr. Owen took a seat, politely condoled with

the pretty widow on her misfortunes, ascertained the interesting fact that her little girl was nearly two years old, and was called Grace, and finally he inquired after Miss Lee.

“ Oh ! Grace is very well. She is up-stairs, working I believe. She works herself to death. Grace, my darling, go up and tell your aunt a gentleman wants to see her.”

The child ran out ; in about a quarter of an hour the door opened again, and Phœbe, who reddened slightly on seeing Mr. Owen, appeared with a message : “ Miss Lee was sorry, but she was engaged.”

“ Painting a card-case, embroidering a purse,” half-disdainfully said Mrs. Lee ; “ just like her. Do not go, Mr. Owen, she will come down presently. Such trashy work as she loses her time with, I confess I never could make up my mind to that. Some fourth or fifth cousin of mine has had the rare kindness to let us share this splendid abode with the woman that takes

care of it, and here, with Phoebe for all our household, we have settled down like two fallen princesses in an old castle."

"But of course!" said Mr. Owen; "you have for yourself and your child some other provision."

"Not a penny," replied Lily, laughing.

"Good!" thought Mr. Owen; "she lives on the work of Grace."

"I have a very fair provision of debts," resumed the pretty widow. "I owe some milliner's and dressmaker's bills, and there is a Mr. Lawson, to whom poor papa foolishly lent a hundred or two some twenty years ago, who is well off, and will not let me have a farthing—all because I cannot prove it."

"Where does he live?" quietly asked Owen.

"Oh, dear! will you really be so kind? Why he lives Number three, Cambridge Terrace. And then there is that crusty Miss Blount, to whom I have written again and again, and who will do nothing for me."

"I know Miss Blount. I shall speak to her."

"You are a dear creature—I wonder why Grace does not come down—do you want very particularly to see her, Mr. Owen—because, to tell you the truth, this is my usual hour for walking."

"There is civility for you," thought Owen; but such had always been the fair Lily's ways, and he cared too little about her to feel even offended.

"Pray do not mind me," he said coolly, "I can wait here until Miss Lee is free."

"Oh! very well, I shall remind her that you are here. *Au revoir*."

She waved her hand gracefully, and vanished. In a few minutes her pretty face appeared through the opening of the door.

"No chance of Grace to-day," she said, with a mocking smile, "she is painting a fan; better come and have a walk with me, Mr. Owen. No! well then, adieu!"

And again she vanished. Mr. Owen remained confounded and indignant. Then anger got the better of love. He rose and took his hat.

"And would you go without seeing me?" said a well-known voice, and a hand laid on his arm arrested him.

He turned round. She stood by his side, smiling and reproachful.

For a moment he looked in her face, then stooping he laid his hot cheek on the hand that still rested on his shoulder.

"Oh! Grace," he said, in words wrung from his heart. "Oh! Grace, it is good to see you again."

"Is it?" she said, giving him a wistful look. She sat down; he sat by her, and gazed long in the face so dear to his heart and eyes. She looked well and happy, and she reddened, and smiled at this earnest gaze.

"You see I found you out!" he said.

"Did I not know you would?" she replied.

“Well, it seems long since we met. You have become a great man since then. Tell me all about it.”

But as she wished he could not speak. Other thoughts filled his heart, other words came to his lips. Thoughts all centring in her; words all reproach and fondness. He did not tell her the story of his worldly fortunes; but of a tormenting search long baffled, of hopes that had charmed or irritated his daily life, of all that now closed and met in her. A deep flush settled on Miss Lee's face; her head was bowed on her bosom; her hands were clasped on her knees; not without effort did she look up at him; and with an embarrassment that became her, perhaps because she was so rarely embarrassed, she said :

“And so you still like me, Mr. Owen? Well, how can I help it? I did not wish to see you, and now that you are come, I am glad. I have been longing to know more of you. And

now do me this kindness for the present—let us forget the Past; let us not speak of the Future; like two tried and faithful friends let us meet, and tell me all—yes, all that has befallen you since we parted.”

He yielded to the soothing charm of a voice so dear, and so long unheard. Sitting by her, looking at her after so long a separation, he would not have loved if he had not felt her his, and all his. What we love truly do we not possess?

She sat turned towards him in a listening and expecting attitude. Men like to speak of themselves to the woman they love. With a pleased smile he yielded to her wish. He told her all; his past failures, his present success, his ambitious hopes; he kept back nothing; the best and the worst traits of his character were laid open to this second self.

And Grace heard him eager and interested. She sat with her elbow on the arm of her

chair, her cheek on her hand, her eyes on his face. When he told her of his hopes and triumphs, they lit with pleasure; when he passed too lightly over some points, she questioned him closely; when he ceased she gaily tapped his shoulder, and said: "Well done, Timon! And now," she added, "begin over again."

Pleasant was the task of speaking to such a listener. But Mr. Owen did not merely speak; he questioned. Grace answered very freely.

"Yes, we live by our work," she said, gaily; "and that life of toil is not without its pleasure. If you pity me, I shall be angry—I tell you I am happy."

"And where is Doctor Crankey?"

"Doctor Crankey is in Rome, compiling for the History of the Church.—Mr. Owen, have you ever met or seen James Crankey?"

"I! Never."

"We know not; no one knows what has become of him. I feel certain he must be

somewhere in London—poor boy—God help him!”

And he saw her cheerful face darken and her bright eyes grow dim.

And thus hours wore away, until dusk stole into the room, and Grace said, smiling:

“Mr. Owen, you must go.”

Reluctantly he rose to obey.

“And at what hour can I see you to-morrow?” he asked, on the door-step.

Miss Lee reddened and looked at him hesitatingly.

“When you like,” she replied, at length. He had been seeking her for months, and she knew not how to say he should not come so soon.

He walked slowly home in the gray twilight, with a young moon and a few early stars in the blue sky. In some months, perhaps in some weeks, all would, he thought, be over. Freely he disposed of the future. Mrs. Gerald was settled on Miss Blount; Grace he shared with

none, and with this loved mistress, wife, and friend, the eager and ambitious man pursued the feverish yet seducing journey of life.

Mr. Owen called the next day, at the hour of Mrs. Gerald Lee's walk; but to his annoyance he found the fair lady with her sister, and evidently not inclined for walking. They sat working together in the dull parlour; as he entered Grace raised her eyes. She saw his look of disappointment, and smiled, conscious of its cause. She was painting a fan; under the convenient pretence of examining her work, he sat down by her. Mrs. Lee netted carelessly, and talked, and put in more than one word for every mesh of her purse. Little Grace played with Scamp, whom Mr. Owen had brought to see his former mistress; Grace was silent; Mr. Owen, who was not in the best of tempers, replied laconically to Mrs. Lee's speech. At the end of two hours he rose.

"And Mr. Lawson?" suddenly said Lily.

And Mr. Owen coolly replied :

“I called on him this morning ; I had some trouble ; nevertheless, I got this from him.” He opened his pocket-book and handed Mrs. Lee a five-pound note.

“Oh ! you dear creature !” cried Lily, jumping up and snatching it from him. “Do you see, Grace ?”

Grace looked surprised ; but said nothing. She thought the circumstance probable enough, or rather, she never thought it doubtful.

“You are very stupid to-day,” said Mrs. Lee ; “is she not, Mr. Owen ? Absorbed in those foolish roses she is copying. I know she is longing to be where they grew.”

“Ah, that I were there !” half sighed Grace, leaning back in her chair, and Mr. Owen saw that she looked pale and fatigued. He stood at the door ; he came back, like one who suddenly remembers a thing he has forgotten.

"Ah! by the way, Mrs. Lee, did you tell me yesterday, you wanted to see Eden?"

"Eden, what's Eden?"

"Oh, then it was some one else."

"Well, but what is Eden?" impatiently asked Lily.

"Only a country seat, some miles off; scarcely worth the trouble of going to it."

"But I should like to see it, at once" said Lily. "I now remember mentioning it. So I must see it, Mr. Owen."

He bowed, and asked to know when.

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow, if possible, it shall be."

Mrs. Lee smiled graciously; Grace gave him a thoughtful look, which he did not heed. With this he left them to call on Mr. Hanley.

"I want an order for Eden," he said, in his direct way; "an order for to-morrow."

"And who do you want to take to Eden?"

"Some ladies."

“Humph! Ladies are expensive things.”

“With expensive things I never have anything to do,” was the dry reply.

“There’s the Honourable Mrs. Chesterfield,” continued Mr. Hanley; “a lovely creature, but decidedly expensive. She put it into her head that I was to give her and a few other ladies a *déjeuner* at the Star and Garter, and I had to do it, and it was expensive.”

“I have another favour to request,” continued Owen. “It is that you will be kind enough to give no other order for to-morrow.”

Mr. Hanley’s face became at once alive with curiosity.

To prevent an unpleasant, but probable intrusion, Owen added. “The ladies I am taking to Eden have been rich and great ladies, and would not like being the objects of vulgar curiosity. I dare say you remember them—Mrs. Gerald Lee and her sister.”

“Ah, indeed!” said Mr. Hanley, surprised.

"I remember them, of course; but it is an age since I saw Miss Lee. That girl has been shamefully used—the way of the world. What foolish stories they made up about her—never believed a word of them—every one else did, and now no one thinks of them, or of her. And the poor girl is forgotten, as if she never lived. The way of the world, sir. The way of the world."

He sat down to write the order, and added the promise that no other order should be given. Early the next morning an open carriage called for Mrs. Gerald Lee. Grace had half reluctantly agreed to accompany her; they took Phœbe to mind little Grace. Mr. Owen had sent a note expressing his regret at unavoidable absence. The truth was, he feared being seen with Miss Lee, and thus reviving a slander that slumbered.

"So we may walk alone about Eden," impatiently said Lily. "Ah!" she added, reclining

back in the carriage ; "this does seem like old times, does it not, Grace?"

"I have had time to forget my carriage," replied Grace, smiling.

"What, even that exquisite one lined with white, in which one looked so well with black velvet."

"Ay, even that. What an Italian day this is."

Eden lay some miles out in the country. They traversed pleasant homely scenery, then reached a pretty villa standing in a solitary spot. Mrs. Gerald was disappointed. "A mere country house ! A fine Eden, indeed." The housekeeper who received them showed them over the house, in which there was little to see, then she opened a door that led into the garden, and with the intimation that no one else was to see it that day, she left them. Grace felt relieved ; she guessed who had thought of this ; Mrs. Lee pouted, and said she hated solitude.

For some time they walked in a very ordinary garden, but as they passed a screen of trees, the beauties of the place suddenly broke upon them. It was a Paradise of roses. Wherever they looked, in winding alleys, in secret bowers, in open sunshine, or dark shade, roses of every hue bloomed and shed their exquisite fragrance on the air. Nothing but these lovely flowers, green trees, and the blue sky could they see. Here ceased earth and the homes of men, and the far horizon of wide plains, and the faint outlines of cloudy hills,—and here seemed to reign the beauty and eternal summer of Eden. They wandered long; at length they rested in one of the wildest and most lovely spots. Dark trees gave deep shade, in which white roses grew and shed their blossoms like a summer snow on the green grass. Farther on, in a neighbouring arbour, red damask, bright yellow, delicate tea roses displayed their gay and luxuriant beauty in the warm noon-day sun.

They sat down in the shade. Little Grace soon wandered away; Phœbe followed; and as they came not back, Lily too went after them. Grace remained alone. She sat, leaning against the broad trunk of an oak, listening in her heart to that mysterious voice which speaks to us in solitude. The sight and odour of these beautiful flowers, led her back into the past. She remembered the little garden which she and Lily had shared in Wales. There grew the same white roses she now saw. In Doctor Crankey's garden, spite the chill blasts of the north, roses bloomed under gentle Miss Amy's care. In her farthest wanderings she had found them. She had seen them in the East; by Lake Lemman, during the short Swiss summer; blushing red and warm in Italian gardens, during the spring-like winter of Rome. Like old friends, they had met her in Wales; and here, too, they offered pleasant welcome. Their beauty, their fragrance acted on her nature, but

too much alive to such impressions. Suddenly she remembered the story that was linked with this spot. Its master was a man rich and young. He loved a beautiful girl, and he married her. She was passionately fond of roses; for her he caused this place to be laid out; and then one day he brought her to it; and when she exclaimed, enchanted with its beauty, he said, smiling: "It is yours." They were young, romantic, and fond. They called it Eden; and here for some time the young lover's fairest and dearest flower bloomed; but suddenly she sickened and died. His grief was great; he left England, he travelled, years passed, he was comforted, and married again. Yearly the roses bloomed in the lonely garden; its master spent large sums to keep it fair and beautiful. But never more would he visit the spot where the tale of his first love had been told,—never more would he see this Eden of his youth.

"Her happiness was brief," thought Grace;

“yet it was happiness. What have I done with my youth? More brief, more fleeting than these roses, it has fled, and, alas! left nothing behind!” She sighed, yet she was not sad. She felt plunged in a sweet and delightful torpor. In vain she tried to rouse herself; it stole over her senses, subtle and strong. At length the waking dream lessened and fled,—she was fast asleep.

The loud and clear song of a blackbird in the tree above her woke her with a start. She looked, she was alone, yet the spot seemed changed. Was this a fairy bird that sang? had she, like bonny Kilmeny in the glen, slept a hundred years and more? was this the garden of Eden, or fairy-land? Fresh plucked roses were scattered on the grass around her, and encircled her like a fairy ring; roses, red, yellow, white, or of their own warm hue, were heaped in her lap; roses filled her hands, and blushed on her bosom; a girdle of roses was fastened around her waist,

and a garland bound her brows. She looked again, and still she saw no one ; but she heard subdued whispering in the neighbouring thicket ; and a rose cast by an invisible hand fell in her lap. Grace laughed, and began to scold. How dare they behave so in a strange garden, gathering all the flowers ? She would tell Mr. Owen, and he would get them punished. Another rose was the only reply she got, but this time she caught sight of the hand that dropped it in her lap, and looking up she saw Mr. Owen standing behind her and smiling. Before she could speak, a thicket partly opened and little fair-haired Grace looked through ; then the dark and pretty head of Phœbe followed, then came the laughing face of Lily. But from the heap of roses in her lap Grace pelted them so heartily, that they quickly retreated ; however the means of retaliation were at hand, and Miss Lee had in her turn to receive a shower of roses, of which not a few by accident or design hit Mr. Owen. He did not condescend

to retaliate. He lay down on the grass, and leaning on one elbow looked on carelessly; he allowed Miss Lee to defend herself as best she might. This war of flowers lasted until Grace, exhausted, sank back laughing, and confessed herself conquered. Lily, Phœbe, and little Grace at once appeared triumphing over her defeat.

Grace let them have their say. She was flushed and warm, and looked too indolent to take the trouble to reply. She looked well too, and better than she thought or knew. The contrast of her black *barège* dress, and of all those bright flowers, of her dark hair and the red roses, was strange and striking. Thus might have looked a Druidess, sitting like her under the mystic oak.

The time had been when if Miss Lee had been seen thus, many a flattering tongue, many a soft speech would have praised her. And now a careless friend, a coquettish maid, a laughing child, who unchecked pulled away her roses, were

all her court. She did not think of this, but one who sat by looking on, thought of it and was glad; he rejoiced that shade and oblivion had gathered around the woman he loved,—that none shared with him the pleasure he found in seeing her thus adorned in the quiet and lovely garden.

At length the day wore away; the sun set; they talked of going. Mr. Owen told them to gather as many roses as they pleased; he helped Grace in the task. Her flowers were the freshest and the brightest; her share was the largest. He heaped her lap and her arms until she laughingly said, Enough. They were alone in a silent alley of white roses, where the blue shadows of evening were softly stealing; the whole air was full of fragrance, but over all predominated the sweet and peculiar perfume of the red damask roses wreathed in the hair of Grace. She sat on a low bank; he stood by her.

“How do you like Eden?” suddenly asked Owen.

“Who would not like Eden?”

“Would you like to live here?”

“Dearly!”

“I too should like it,” and he smiled.

Ay with her, for surely he cared little for the roses, and what would be the fairest Eden without an Eve?

Lily by coming up checked all further discourse; she complained of the chill evening air; they left the garden; the carriage that had brought them took them away through dusky evening; Mr. Owen accompanied them and left them at the door of their own house. Phœbe had taken away the drowsy child; Lily reclined on the old sofa in the dull parlour; Grace, kneeling on the floor, was putting her roses in a large white vase full of water.

“I wonder, Grace, what you see in that dreadful little flirt,” suddenly said Mrs. Gerald Lee.

“What little flirt?” asked Grace.

“Why, Phœbe of course. What do we want with her?”

“Surely she is useful; we could ill spare her. I give her no wages; yet I do her a kindness by keeping her here safe from harm. I did not seek her—she came.”

“Yes, yes I know, and that is all very true. But the way in which she strove to draw Mr. Owen’s attention to-day was quite ridiculous. And then the liberty she took to throw roses at him, impertinent little thing!”

“To me, Phœbe seems shy with Mr. Owen.”

“Too shy a great deal! My dear creature do not look so annoyed. How simple you must be. Phœbe by her own account spent some weeks under Mr. Owen’s paternal roof. Phœbe comes here, Mr. Owen appears—why I dare say it was to gratify the pretty creature we were taken to Eden to-day.”

“I do not believe it!” said Grace reddening.

“How can you tell? I suppose because it is

very wrong. Why, my dear," continued Mrs. Gerald Lee, who in her way was a pretty little cynic, "you know nothing of the world, we should not be the first ladies that have received visits for the sake of a pretty maid. There have been gentlemen, real gentlemen, who felt what is called a grand passion for the mistress, and could bestow a little superfluous affection on the attendant."

Grace laughed good-humouredly, and looked frankly and fearlessly in her sister's face.

"Why Lily!" she said gaily, "you are quite hurt, quite nettled. Now, seriously, has Mr. Owen produced an impression on you?"

"On me! on me!" cried Mrs. Gerald Lee, "the dark ugly man!"

"Well then, child, let him alone and Phœbe too, or I shall say you are jealous of her beauty."

"No, you will not," said Lily smiling, "for you know you have often told me I am the prettiest creature you ever saw."

“So you are—when you are good.”

Lily laughed, and starting up, passed her arms around the neck of Grace, and kissed her.

“It is you who are good,” she said, “good and generous as your own red roses there. Only, as I am not and never could be like you, where is the use to try? I know you are going to sit up to work, and I ought too; but I am so tired—and so good-night, Grace.”

And with another kiss she left her. She was but a few minutes gone when Phœbe entered.

“Please ma’am,” she said hurriedly, “I want to speak to you.”

“What is it?” asked Grace smiling.

“Indeed, ma’am,” said Phœbe reddening, “you must not be angry, but I was in the passage, and I heard what Mrs. Gerald said about Mr. Owen and me. Indeed, ma’am, the lady wrongs us both. I never threw one rose at the gentleman; it was Mrs. Gerald, and surely she ought to know. And now, ma’am, do hear me

and forgive me; for I confess I have been very foolish with Mr. Owen. Indeed, I have." And Phœbe sank in tears at the feet of her mistress, who looked confounded. "Ah! it was Mr. Rashleigh spoiled me," resumed Phœbe, "he flattered me so that when I was at Mr. Owen's I turned foolish. He seemed kind, I thought—and so I thought that perhaps, I know it was very ridiculous, he would marry me."

Phœbe paused; Grace half smiled; the girl resumed, in a low tone:

"Well, ma'am, I guess you think me very foolish, and indeed I was so foolish that Mr. Owen perceived it, and laughed at me for my pains. And well he might, for, as I saw, he had set his heart on a lady whom I knew, and though he was so jealous like about it that he never even named her to me, yet I remembered how he had looked when I had mentioned her name; and how, though I was so blind as not

to see it then, he had betrayed every sign of an overpowering passion."

"Never mind Mr. Owen, or his overpowering passion," said Grace; "is that all?"

"Yes, ma'am, it is all. I am grateful to Mr. Owen, because I owe much to him; but, though I was foolish, I think he need scarce have laughed at me; and though I am grateful, I do not like him—he has humbled me too much."

"He meant well," soothingly said Grace.

"I dare say he did, ma'am; but I cannot like him, and I never threw one rose at him."

"Phœbe," resumed Grace, "it is very good of you to come and tell me all this, but how came you to think I ever could think wrong of you or of Mr. Owen? Why should I? It is so hard to believe the wrong, so easy to believe the good. Mrs. Gerald spoke lightly, it is her way. And then, why kneel down and beg my forgiveness—for having listened in the passage?"

“No, ma’am, not for that; for having been so foolish with Mr. Owen.”

Miss Lee reddened a little, and with a smile she told Phœbe to rise, and bade her a kind good-night.

CHAPTER XIII.



For three days Mr. Owen did not go near Miss Lee. His mind and his heart were in a fever. That day in Eden haunted him. He felt ever near Grace in that lovely garden, breathing in the fragrance of the roses in her hair. "Is she so indifferent and so cold," he thought, "or is she not, like many another woman, to be won by wooing? Ah! if I thought so!" And an inward voice answered, "Try."

And, with his mind resolved, he called on her that evening. He found her alone, and, as ever, working.

He sat down by her, and looking steadily in her face, he said :

“ Grace, you know that I love you—will you be my wife ? ”

“ No,” she answered, smiling. “ I have already answered that question.”

Not discouraged, he took her hand, and pleaded his cause. He loved, and he was eloquent ; Grace heard him out, yet he did not prevail. He dropped her hand ; he rose, and walking up and down the room, he broke out into passionate reproaches. She listened silently, still working on : at length he paused before her, and said, with some bitterness :

“ I see it ; you dislike me ! ”

Her work dropped on her lap : she raised her clear eyes to his :

“ I dislike you ! ” she echoed, “ and you—do you like me ? You began by disliking me—you slighted me—you made a jest of me ; and, without cause—without motive—you wronged me. I fell ill—suddenly you turned from dislike to passion. Esteem, regard, did not with you,

as with others, ripen into strong and durable affection. I am not a young girl—I am not beautiful—I was unconscious then; if you liked me, it was because your hour was come—for nothing else, Mr. Owen. But you say I dislike you—yes, Mr. Owen, I dislike you with the same dislike which I felt for you as a girl, which I felt in the dell of the Ap Rhydon, in Wales, in London, everywhere—here and now.”

He looked at her; his cheek flushed, his look lit.

“Grace,” he said, in a low tone, “I think sometimes that you like me more than you yourself know, and that with time——”

Grace reddened, and rose.

“I see what it is,” she interrupted, hastily; “you must come no more.”

He looked confounded. He could not believe in the hard sentence. He said she was jesting; but, with increased firmness, she resumed:

“I am not jesting, Mr. Owen. I know you

—you have an encroaching, imperious temper. Either you must put away thoughts that could only lead to our mutual unhappiness—or we must part.”

“Let us part, then,” he said, turning pale with anger, and rising, he left her.

Grace sat down, and again took up her work. In a little while Lily came down.

“Well, where is Mr. Owen?” she asked, looking round.

“He is gone.”

Mrs. Gerald paused; then she asked, “Why did he go?”

Grace did not reply.

“How stupid you seem to-night,” said her sister.

“My head aches;” and she leaned her forehead on her hand.

“Very tiresome of him to go,” resumed Lily; “I want him to call again on Mr. Lawson; my new mourning bonnet and Grace’s frock have not left much of the five pounds. I know I

am a dreadfully extravagant creature; however: that is not it; I want you to tell Mr. Owen to call again on Mr. Lawson. You understand?"

Grace assented briefly. Mrs. Gerald yawned; and feeling sleepy, soon left her. Grace remained alone working. At half-past eleven the parlour-door opened, and Phœbe looked in with a frightened air.

"Please, ma'am, there's Mr. Owen at the door, and he says he must come in, and that he must speak to you."

Grace looked flushed and flurried, and rising, she said,

"Show him in, Phœbe; it can only be to say a few words—wait in the passage."

Scarcely had she ceased when he entered; he closed the door; he flung, rather than he put down, his hat, and threw himself in a chair. Grace stood by him, waiting silently. At length he spoke:

"Yes," he said, "I am come back after all.

Make your own conditions. I submit—hard as they are, they are not so hard as absence. Two hours ago I left this house, vowing to enter it no more, for you had stung me; and when I reached my own home I found that anger is weak, and that love is strong; and so I came back, a willing slave, to the chain I had broken, glad to wear again the badge of my bondage. Grace, you told me so yourself this evening—you are not a young girl, you are not very beautiful; by what spell, by what charm, have you bewitched me, me a man—not a boy—your equal in every respect—I know not; but I feel that, rebel as I will, that spite of pride and shame, I must still come back to you as to the sun and light of my life.”

His brow burned, and his lips quivered, as he uttered the passionate confession, all the more passionate for being both indignant and reluctant. Grace blushed like a rose, and as she blushed she smiled.

"I knew you would come back to-night," she said, "I sat up waiting."

He looked up at her, leaning her elbow on the back of his chair; she gazed at him, smiling.

"What ails you?" she resumed: "let the past and the future sleep—is not the present pleasant? Your prospects are promising, but uncertain. You are in debt, too, and you want to take a wife. My friend, you have other work to do; give to that work all your energy, and your might. Forget that I am a woman; remember that I am a friend; come and see me often, and leave to Time that which is Time's own."

He could not take his eyes from her; she stood there by him, familiar and fearless; and in his lover's eyes, both fearless and enchanting.

"And so," he said, "you knew I was coming back, and you sat up waiting, and yet you would have banished me. Grace, I do not understand you. Are you prudent or are you indifferent?"

Ah ! if I could think it was prudence—Speak, Grace, for the doubt tortures me.”

But Grace only smiled, and did not reply ; she seemed to take a dangerous pleasure in keeping under her control a nature so rebellious and so ardent.

“ You smile ! ” he exclaimed reproachfully. “ Oh ! Grace, you are a true woman ; in what I suffer you see nothing but a triumph, won over my pride.”

Grace still smiling said, without answering :

“ When I was Miss Lee, the great lady, when I kept my carriage and had a house in Hyde Park, I had suitors by the dozen. I remember once reckoning up a Viscount, a Baronet, a Banker, a Judge, an Author, a Merchant, and a Portrait-painter. They were all making love to me at the same time, and each of course after his own fashion. And now I am reduced to one, and he grudges me, the world’s poor fallen idol, the only admirer left me by Fate.”

“I grudge you nothing, Grace; it is you who grudge me one little word of kindness.”

“What do you want?”

“Promise to marry me some day—say twenty years hence.”

“I could not have the conscience to keep you waiting six years longer than Jacob, who was a Patriarch, and could afford the time. Therefore, I do not promise; and now, Mr. Owen, as you will not go, and as I cannot in decent civility turn you out, and as Phoebe is waiting in the passage—Good-night.”

He turned round quickly; in vain, she was gone.

A Monk once fell into a certain sin. The Father Abbot reproved him sharply; the Monk excused himself, saying: “The Evil One tempted me.” Scarcely were the words uttered when an invisible hand dealt him a smart buffet on the cheek, and a voice said: “Liar, thou

knowest that in that sin I had no part; thine own evil heart tempted thee, not I."

And thus it was once with Love. No little thing could elope; no boy could marry his mother's maid; no girl could jilt one lover for another, no lady could prove foolish, no gay husband turn faithless, no deed of folly or sin could be committed, but Love bore the blame. Poor Love waxed wroth and said: "Ungrateful Mortals! I came to raise and ennoble you, to light in your poor human hearts a spark of the sacred flame that burns for ever in heaven. I came to give you a worship beyond the worship of self, a joy beyond the joys of sense—and thus ye repay me! With my sacred torch you light your earthly fires; in my name you sin and cover my brow with shame—farewell!"

Having delivered which speech, the angry God opened his rosy wings and fled for ever from this miserable earth; that is to say, he forsook it as a

dwelling-place, but now and then he comes back and honours a few faithful hearts with his presence. These stolen visits have given rise to a thousand idle rumours. Some say "Love is here," and others say "he is there," whilst Love all the time is far away, fast asleep, in his native Eden.

But it is useless to tell people so. Young ladies as they curl their hair at night distinctly see him in the glass; young men as distinctly hear him dictating every word of their first love letter: so positive are they that their more sober elders end by believing them, and judging this supposed spirit from his effects, pronounce him a very mischievous spirit, and wonder for what purpose and what end he was allowed to haunt hapless youth.

And thus it is that Love, who is so much spoken of, is so seldom beheld. Vanity, Curiosity, Idleness, borrow his guise and his wings, and in his name play all sorts of mischievous tricks.

His semblance is often seen : his reality very rarely. When he comes, too, it is not always in peaceful or friendly guise. Wearied of insults the God now and then loses his temper. The passion he once meant as a blessing, he now often inflicts as a punishment. To those who insulted feelings they were not privileged to know, he sends those feelings in angry mood.

Was Mr. Owen's love for Grace a good or an evil?—he knew not, but there were moments when he felt as much anger against as love for her. He submitted to the restrictions she laid upon him, but it was because he could not help himself; they galled him in his love as much as in his pride. Nothing hurt him so much as that either because Grace wished it, or because Mrs. Gerald took pleasure in their company, he seldom or ever saw Miss Lee alone.

Mr. Owen rendered himself peculiarly acceptable to this lady, by calling occasionally on Mr. Lawson, who again proved conscientious to the

amount of not a few five-pound notes. Yet he neither liked nor esteemed her; he only wished to relieve Grace from too heavy a burden; a wish often frustrated by the extravagance of the fair Lily.

Miss Lee, who had once been so wealthy, and who had always been independent, now earned her daily bread by the ill-paid labour of woman. She made purses, she embroidered bags, she painted fans; whatever she did, she worked night and day. Mr. Owen saw it, and it cut him to the heart that she would not share his happier destiny. It irritated him, too, beyond his limited amount of patience, to hear from the fair Lily such remarks as—"I know I ought to help you, Grace, but if I am so idle by nature that I cannot work, why then I cannot help it, can I, darling?" And she would kiss and fondle her, and Grace, smiling, returned the caresses. She never seemed so happy as when the pretty fair head of Lily was laid on her shoulder, and little

Grace played at her feet, and she sitting thus between the mother and the child, could toil for both.

Mr. Owen was not, and could not be jealous ; but it stung him to think he was to share Grace with such objects. She gave him many signs of her friendship ; none of the love he daily saw her bestowing upon them. And she wanted him too to feel that affection. She asked if Lily, with all her faults, was not a charming little thing—so frank, so artless ; if ever he had known such an engaging child as little Grace ? And to please her, Mr. Owen praised Mrs. Gerald Lee ; little as he cared for children, he allowed her child to climb up his knee, to play with him ; he even bought her cakes and toys, all to win a kinder look—a brighter smile. And little Grace soon learned to look out for his coming, to clap her hands at his approach, and judging him more by his actions than by the somewhat cool and careless reception he gave her, to bestow on him

tokens of childish fondness. He bore with her caresses, but he did not return them, and yet, sometimes when she suddenly left the arms of Grace to run into his, he pressed her to his heart, and bent over her with involuntary emotion ; and once when he had brought her an unusually fine present, and Grace, after giving her adopted niece a laughing kiss, sent her to thank her friend, Mr. Owen, taking the child on his knee, gently kissed the innocent brow that still kept the trace of the lips of her he loved.

“ Mr. Owen is getting quite fond of children,” said Grace, pleased and surprised.

“ Quite,” echoed the light voice of Lily.

And Mr. Owen looking up, met her mocking blue eyes, and read in them that Mrs. Gerald was not so ingenuous as Miss Lee. With a frown he put the child away, and thought, “ It is time to rid Grace of that pretty burden, and myself of an obstacle.”

The same evening he went up to Miss Blount's.

With frank ingratitude, he had never gone near her since she had procured him the address of Grace. He found her pale and altered. She had been ill.

Mr. Owen was not a tender man; yet the sight of this solitary misanthropic woman moved him; but half sternly Miss Blount repelled his sympathy, and with a sarcastic smile asked how he could snatch himself from Miss Lee's delightful society to seek an old woman like her.

"I have just left Miss Lee; besides she will not miss me."

"Oh, she is unkind, is she? Well, Mr. Owen, I never shall be able to understand what you see in that little dark girl."

He smiled, but the smile vanished when she added: "And when do you get married?"

"There is no talk of marriage," he replied sharply.

Miss Blount whistled.

"And so," she said, "the passion is really all

on your side ; and for five weeks you have been dangling after a woman who does not care for you. Poor fellow ! I pity you."

"Do not—I like it."

"No you don't. However, since it is so sore a subject, let it drop. I dare say you will end by turning misanthropic like me, and living utterly alone, as I do now."

"I have my doubts about that," composedly said Mr. Owen. "You have a beautiful and charming relative, a widow and her orphan child, I dare say they will end by living with you."

Miss Blount raised the light until it fell on his face.

"Oh !" she exclaimed, ironically, "that explains your visit. This beautiful, charming creature, and her orphan child are in the way, and you would fain palm them upon me."

"Yes, they are in my way," he replied, carelessly ; "I might deny it ; but with a person of your penetration where would be the use. Why

should you not take them? Of the mother I say nothing—the child.”

“I detest children—all little hypocrites,” angrily interrupted Miss Blount; “I beg you will mention this subject no more. We have plenty else to occupy us,” she added more calmly. “The Walton Company are at their old tricks. Miss Blount is to be locked up as a lunatic; however, Miss Blount feels inclined to prove restive. And since the Walton Company will not have peace, why Miss Blount will e’en give them war.”

Mr. Owen’s eyes lit, and his heart leaped, at a success he had not hoped for; but he disguised his exultation, and feigned to doubt her resolve. “Her health was failing,” he said, “he advised her to try and compromise the matter; peace was better—”

“I tell you, sir,” indignantly interrupted Miss Blount, “that I will have no compromise. I confess they wearied me; but now I feel rested.

And this last shabby attack of theirs has revived my strength. I tell you, sir, that I will yet crush the Walton Company; and that I shall ride past their closed offices in a carriage of my own, with blue and yellow liveries that have belonged from time immemorial to the Blount family. But if you, sir, feel timid, and unequal to cope with such enemies, why, sir, you may say so; I can procure other aid."

She had returned to her grand and condescending ways. Owen laughed, and hoped Miss Blount would not have the unkindness to cut him, and Miss Blount in softer tones replied, that if he would prove himself a man of business, and not a love-sick fool, she should see.

"Try me," he said, turning rather disdainful at the imputation.

Miss Blount was willing. At once they plunged eagerly into a sea of law matters, whither we will not follow them. Of all men, Mr. Owen was the last to lead a life of mere

feeling. However deep Grace might be in his heart, she was after all an episode in his existence. His ambition, his profession, the world, filled hours in which he gave her no share. And now the Walton Company absorbed and interested him even more than it did Miss Blount. She had right on her side, and she had money too. For years she had struggled bravely against opponents of gigantic strength; and now when she stood a fair chance of success, she called him in to reap a ripe and full harvest of triumph, of money and repute.

“Truly fortune favours me,” he thought, as he left her late that night. “Ah, if Grace only would.” But quickly fled the passing thought, absorbed in a host of others less tender. Indeed for some days Mr. Owen was so thoroughly occupied, that he could not find a moment to go to Grace, and he merely wrote a hurried note briefly excusing his unavoidable absence.

But on the fourth day he could bear no more; his heart, his eyes, his whole being pined for her sight and presence. He ate a hurried dinner; took a cab and drove off; it was dusk when he reached the lonely house and entered the dull parlour. He found her sitting alone by the open window in the dim twilight; her brow rested on her hand: on hearing Phœbe announce his presence, she neither moved nor turned round. He went and sat down by her; she drew away her chair.

“And is this your greeting?” he said, impatiently. “When, after days of absence, I see you alone, too, without that eternal Mrs. Lee?”

Grace did not reply, but he thought he heard her weeping; then from reproaches he changed to sudden tenderness. He told her what he had told her so often in vain, and pleaded once more with fervent eloquence the cause he never yet had won; his heart, his soul were in it.

Grace heard him with unusual patience, and when he concluded, when he entreated for a word, a sign of favour or hope, she quietly put her hand into his. In a transport of joy, the proud man raised it to his lips and kissed it fervently.

“How rude you are, Mr. Owen,” said Mrs. Gerald, rising; for alas! it was she and not Grace.

Mr. Owen loved; he loved passionately. He had poured out his heart, his whole heart at the feet of his idol; he had kissed her hand with even more than a lover's devotion, and it stung him almost beyond the habitual self-control of a proud heart, to find that Mrs. Gerald's ear had listened to his ardent confession, that to her he had humbled his pride; that her hand had received the fond homage intended for her sister. Mrs. Gerald lit the lamp, then turned round laughing.

“Dear me, Mr. Owen,” she said, “you need

not look so put out. If you and Grace had been more frank, I should never have felt tempted to find out."

"Find out what?" asked Mr. Owen, pale with wrath, but calm enough in appearance.

Lily laughed. "How angry you look," she said.

"Angry!" he replied. "Angry about what? For so fair a lady's kindness? that would be strange and bearish indeed!" And as Mrs. Gerald had sat down, he resumed his place by her side.

"Kind!" said Lily, "it was you, Mr. Owen, who were kind to yourself, not I."

But Mr. Owen persisted, he would be grateful, and Lily, unable to bear this, turned red and angry, and in her anger exclaimed:

"I could be kinder still, Mr. Owen, I could tell you things you dream not of—things that would delight you."

Her meaning was plain enough; but Mr.

Owen, as if bent on exasperating her, feigned to doubt, not her power, but her will to speak. And he so worked on her wounded self-love, that the flighty, imprudent creature, whom marriage, maternity, and widowhood could not impress with a proper sense of self-respect, forgot herself so far as to become his ally against Grace Lee and betray the confidence of her sister. Having first exacted and obtained a solemn promise of secrecy, she said: "I got round Grace last night; Grace looked dull, I said it was on your account. She denied it; but I insisted; I saw, I said, that she had no confidence in me, and declared it made me quite miserable. The dear creature looked so sorry and so kind. She acknowledged she thought much of you; I wanted her to confess that you were engaged; she denied it strongly, then suddenly in that free, frank way which becomes her, but would not become every woman, she said: 'No, Lily, we are not to marry; yet he must marry no

other woman, nor I any other man, else woe be to us both. We are not bound, yet we are not free. We need never be more to one another than we are to-day; yet death alone must, and death alone shall part us.' And more from the provoking creature I could not get; that was just what tempted me this evening. And now Mr. Owen, you know I have your word, never to repeat this to Grace, who, dear, good girl, never thought of asking me for any such promise, so you see," added the little traitress, "I was free to repeat it all to you."

Mr. Owen did not heed her; his thoughts had fastened on those strange words of Grace. They troubled his very heart; he had not time to think or question; the parlour-door opened, and Grace herself stood before him. On seeing him, her face lit with pleasure, but it was a calm pleasure. She gave him her hand, but as we give the hand to a friend. She sat down between him and her sister and spoke kindly;

but she spoke gaily too, without a touch of sentiment or romance. In vain in her aspect—in her looks—words and tones he sought for traces of the half-passionate confession Lily had heard :

“ We are not bound, yet we are not free ;—death alone must, and death alone shall part us.”

“ What did, what could she mean ? ” he thought feverishly, as he sat by this strange half of his being, so near and so far ; so well known and so mysterious. “ Is it love, or love’s shadow ? Indifference has not such words, or such thoughts ; passion is more complete. O that I knew—that for a moment I could look deep into what she hides so well ! ” But in vain he bent the whole powers of his mind on that one object ; the pleasant voice that echoed in his ear, the clear look that met his, the frank smile, contained no revelation. He left her, baffled and irritated : the submission and patience of weeks fled and gone in that one evening.

The summer vacation was come, Mr. Owen

could spare more time to give to Grace. He came daily, and stayed long; often Grace was not within; she had gone to town to take back or to bring home work; he scarcely regretted it; for whilst awaiting her return, he could see Lily, who always had something or other to tell.

It is hard to say what spirit of idleness or mischief, and they are much akin, prompted her conduct; but this faithless friend seemed to take a perverse pleasure in wringing half confessions from Grace, which she had no sooner received than she repeated to John Owen. His eager ear greedily took in every word; he hated to learn from another what the lips of Grace should have told him, yet the indulgence was too great to be relinquished; and thus matters went on, and he drank deep of draughts delightful, but poisoned, for their source was not pure.

Grace was kind and friendly; but less than ever was Mr. Owen satisfied with her kindness and her friendliness. How far he stood in her

heart, even Lily could not tell him ; but that he stood farther than Grace showed, he knew. He knew that if she gave much, she withheld more. When they chanced to be alone, when he ventured on speech too ardent, on words and wishes too exacting, she checked him with a coldness which he felt the more keenly that his knowledge of the truth came from a source he could not betray. Unconsciously, he began to amass, against the being he most loved, a secret store of anger and bitterness. When he felt the sting of her seeming indifference, he vowed to himself that he would yet some day be paid out, and compel the proud girl to make up in love and fondness the full measure she now dealt him in coldness and pride. He was by nature too haughty, he had too long rebelled against the mere thought of submitting to a woman, not to feel his present submission a little resentfully. Away from her he formed many a proud resolve; but once near her,—once within her

look and her smile,—all his pride vanished, and he was docile and humble as a child.

But from these alternations of submissive or rebellious passion, Grace suffered something in his love. Double-dealing, too, bore other fruits. In the presence of Grace he thought of none save her ; and, present or absent, she was the sovereign mistress of his heart. But Lily was exquisitely pretty ; and when they were alone, as they now so often were, it was too pleasant to his man's vanity and pride to have this beautiful young creature so much under the control of his will. A sort of infidelity crept into his thoughts : Grace was his queen, Lily his slave ; and he forgot that a truly loved woman fills all her lover's heart.

And Lily saw and liked it ; love she cared not for, and would not have understood ; the sort of admiration he gave gratified and sufficed her. This Mr. Owen knew, else he might have been careful ; he had many faults, but he was not a

male flirt. There is no denying, too, that if Mrs. Gerald Lee had taken the liberty of falling in love with him, he would thereby have been much annoyed; but he knew well enough that no such calamity was to be apprehended, the lady not having a heart to lose; and, therefore, with no check from conscience, he made of her what she was willing to be made,—the graceful toy of an idle hour. Thus both did their best to profane the pure and beautiful instincts which God has placed in the human heart. Nevertheless, Mr. Owen, anything but a man to be contented with kind words retailed second-hand, ended by wearying of all this. He returned to his old wish of having Grace to himself; he again spoke to Miss Blount; of Lily he said little, but he tempted the solitary woman with the young and innocent child, and Fortune being inclined to favour him, he succeeded; but better, to say the truth, than he wished or expected.

He had a long business conversation with Miss

Blount; he was rising to leave her, when suddenly he turned back.

“By the way,” he said, “I have something to give you. I was talking of you to a lady I will not name, when a very young lady gave me a kiss with the strict injunction to deliver it safely to you.”

“And will you really have that courage?” asked Miss Blount, smiling sadly.

He stooped and kissed her faded cheek.

She seemed taken by surprise.

“You are a brave man,” said Miss Blount. “You are not afraid of wrinkles and of age, John!” she added, laying her hand on his arm, and looking wistfully in his face. “Sit down, I want to speak to you. I like you, John Owen; there are better men than you are; but I like you as a son. Let me prove it; you know I must succeed; you say so; you know it. I shall have and leave a large fortune; I have but two heirs; both I despise; yet I cannot

and I will not despoil even for you the most worthless that own a drop of good Blount blood. John, women are worth very little ; they are all alike ; one is as good as another ; Lily is beautiful ; she is too light and too selfish ever to prove unfaithful. She is not bad-tempered ; she will make a good wife, as the run of wives goes. Give up that dark girl, who is poor, disgraced, and who does not like you. Marry Lily. I will leave you both all I have."

Mr. Owen laughed.

"Marry Lily," he said. "Well, Miss Blount, I do not mind ; but I must first marry the little dark girl, you know."

Miss Blount frowned.

"Foolish man ! foolish man ! to reject a beautiful woman for the sake of a plain one ; an heiress for a creature that has not a rag to her back."

"Strange and ridiculous, I confess it ; but you see there is no accounting for tastes, and mine do not lie in a vulgar direction."

Miss Blount argued ; but Mr. Owen, without taking the trouble to combat her arguments, still laughed and jested and of course remained unmoved.

“ Well, well,” she said, “ please yourself ; ’tis your right. However, because you were not afraid of kissing an old woman’s cheek, I will even do something that will please you. Tell the faithless little thing, that I will receive her and her child, and that as they behave, they shall find me. But I put one condition ; neither the mother nor the child are to hold any communication with that Miss Lee.”

“ Why so ? ” asked Owen, surprised.

“ Because it pleases me,” was her dry answer. “ Attempt to make me retract that, and I retract all.”

He did not attempt it ; but undertook to deliver, both her offer and her conditions, to Mrs. Gerald Lee the very next day. He found the two sisters sitting together, and for a

wonder, the fair Lily was working. Little Grace was playing at their feet. Mr. Owen looked at the group he had done his best to divide, and though he did not repent, he felt sorry for Grace. "I had a long conversation with Miss Blount, last night," he began.

Lily looked up from her work ; she half hoped that a twenty pound note at least would come forth.

"Mr. Owen," said Grace, rather seriously, "you mean well, but you know my opinion on this subject. Why trouble Miss Blount about Lily, who, thank God, does not want her. We can work—we are independent."

Mr. Owen without heeding this continued :

"Miss Blount will be happy to give Mrs. Gerald Lee and her child a home."

"They have a home," quickly said Grace ; Lily threw her arms around Miss Lee's neck. "I don't want to leave you," she said, caressingly. "I like you, Grace. I like

you a great deal better than musty old Miss Blount."

"You had better reflect, Mrs. Gerald," drily said Owen, "you may be rejecting for yourself or your child a large fortune. Miss Blount promises nothing, it is true; but I know it will be in her power to do much."

On hearing the words "large fortune," the blue eyes of Lily sparkled; and with her head still on the shoulder of Grace, she gave Mr. Owen a quick look, but she said nothing. Grace seemed moved, and, with a subdued sigh, she said: "A large fortune we both once had. That time is gone, and little Grace has nothing. You must accept, Lily, for the sake of the child."

"Miss Blount is a peculiar person," resumed Mr. Owen; "with her, prejudices outlive years. I am sorry to name the conditions she adds to this favour: neither Mrs. Gerald nor her child whilst residing with her, are to see or hold intercourse with Miss Lee." Involuntarily Grace

clapsed Lily closer, and with her other hand drew to her side Lily's child. But she quickly checked herself, and said, with a smile :

"Miss Blount has not forgiven me. Well, Lily, do not cry ; life is long, we shall meet again."

Lily wept, and Grace smiled ; but Mr. Owen knew to which heart the blow had gone home.

"You will not miss me, but I shall miss you," said Lily, still in tears. "You are my angel. I know I am ungrateful ; and yet, in my way, Grace, I love you more than you can love me, because you are better than I am ; I know you cannot trust me."

"Why not ?" interrupted Grace, looking down fondly at the beautiful face that rested on her shoulder ; "Why should I not trust you, darling ?"

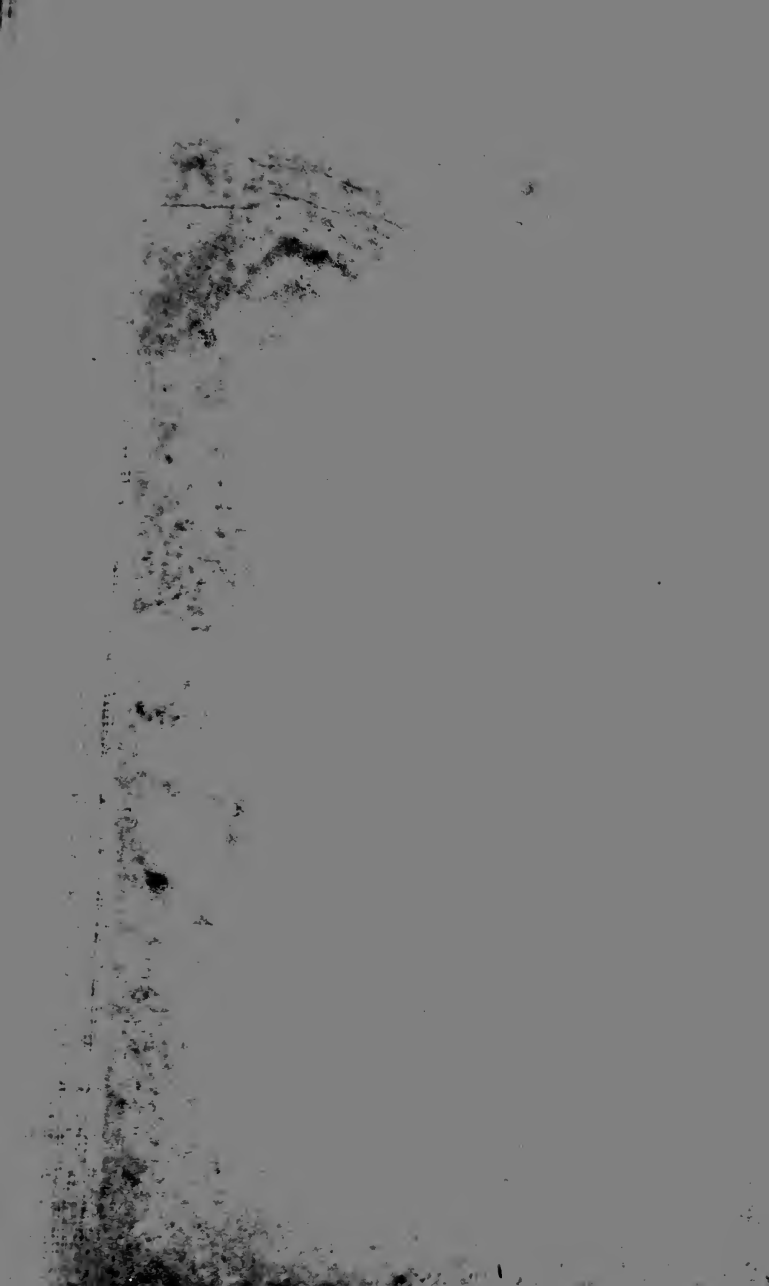
The little traitress had the grace to redden, and to cast a covert conscious look towards Mr. Owen. Then the spirit of mischief prompted her to say :

“And Mr. Owen,—do you trust Mr. Owen, Grace?”

“Why not?” asked Grace; “why should I not trust our kind friend?” and she held out her hand to him. Mr. Owen was so much disturbed, that he scarcely took or touched it. He knew that he had acted an unworthy part towards her,—a part of treachery and fraud,—and he blushed inwardly. And thus it was decided. And on the next day but one, Mr. Owen was to take Lily and her child to Miss Blount’s home.

END OF VOL. II.





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